

“NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE DYNAMICS OF THE ADOPTION TRIANGLE  
USING  
BIOGRAPHICAL, LITERARY AND PSYCHOANALYTIC SOURCES.”

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## **Abstract**

The difficulty of qualitative research in the area of adoption process is the starting point for this work. Forms of data gathering and analysis that will capture the emotionality of adoption participants are outlined. The aim was to extend our psychoanalytic understanding of the dynamics of the ‘searching’ phenomenon in the adoption triangle. A review of the psychoanalytic literature pertinent to adoption was compiled and the applicability of the core concepts explored. There was a clear fit between these tools and the task of understanding the multi-layered nature of adoption.

A systematic thematic analysis of narrative accounts of the lived experience of four subjects at each of the three points of the triangle (12 in total), revealed a number of new themes. Many of them were not found in the existing literature in the same way. It was apparent that the majority of the themes were evident in all three positions of the adoption triangle.

The most significant among these was evidence of a particular kind of ‘triangular psychology’. The adoption triangle members were consistently preoccupied at many levels with those occupying *both* the other two positions.

This stands in some contrast to a tendency in the literature to assume that subjects are dyadically preoccupied with those occupying just one of the other positions. This research suggested that all were triadically relating within the triangle.

The empirical work in this research suggests the manner in which these preoccupations persist through time in complex and fluid interactions with each another. The idea of ‘triangular psychology’ illuminates the phenomenon of the ‘search’ as a core existential predicament in the lives and minds of adoption participants.

In addition, a systemic thematic review of two novels in which adoption is a major theme was undertaken. The analysis of the novels (one from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one from the 21<sup>st</sup> century) had a remarkable concordance with the themes from the research

interviews. The vast majority of the interview themes were also present in the work by the two novelists.

The implications for therapeutic work are considered. A more three dimensional way of thinking about object relationships is required when psychotherapy is offered to adoption related individuals.

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**Dedication.**

My father died in 2012 before this work was completed and it is dedicated to him.

## **Chapter One.**

### **Introduction, context and research question.**

“Adoption is an emotive subject entangled in webs of confusion and fantasy. ‘Mother’, ‘infant’ and ‘family’ are not neutral systems of thought but terms loaded with emotions, beliefs and fantasies. An adoptive family has to be forged through the various discourses of family life and the social injunctions of what a family should be. Whether adopted or not, individual fantasies of family life are formed within these social and cultural demands. Elinor Rosenberg (1992) has pointed out that until recently (1970a) adoption was seen, unproblematically, as providing solutions for all those involved. This rather simplistic view of adoption led to a denial of its difficulties and complexities. The call for ‘love’ as if it will simply repair and make good the losses and absences of the human condition in general, and the adoption situation in particular, is no longer feasible or realistic”. (Treacher and Katz, 2000:11)

### **Introduction.**

Adoption and loss are intrinsically linked. The impact on the adopted child of losing a birth mother, on the birth mother of giving away a child and on the adoptive parent of giving up a view of themselves as capable of creating new life are three painful factors which appear in the narratives of adoption.

George Eliot’s last novel ‘Daniel Deronda’ (1876) is, inter alia, a rich description of adoption. Deronda’s own understanding of his past initially contains much fantasy and frank guesswork. A wealthy English gentleman adopts Deronda and gives him a materially excellent start to life with many privileges. In one painful scene with his teacher, the 13 year old Deronda suddenly makes a link between himself as an adoptee and the illegitimate children he was reading about in history class.

“... the idea that others probably knew things concerning him which they did not choose to mention, and which he would not have had them mention”. (Eliot, 1876:142)



The assumption is made that he is the illegitimate offspring of the wealthy gentleman. However, when his estranged birth mother struggles with her own ambivalence about giving birth and arranges to meet Daniel, his world changes. He finds himself searching for his roots in a culture that at the time was diametrically opposite to his adopted life. The impact of the search for the truth of his origins and the reality of his losses perceived in a very different manner, bring Deronda to a crossroads of development in his life and his mind (Williams and Waddell 1991).

Novy (2007) has written about the manner in which Eliot's character portrays identity searching in adoption.

"...Daniel Deronda relates adoptees' discovery of their heredity to a drastic redefinition of their personal and national identity and their vocation. In the simple terms of slogan, the novel makes a powerful case for the view that adoptees must learn their heredity to know who they really are." (Novy 2007:156)

However, not all non-fictional adoptees have such clarity of transformation. Loss and its impact can often be hidden underground or become overwhelming. The various participants in the adoption process are often far from the ideal point of using such a 'working through' for complete change. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the field of adoption and chart the evolution of the research question.

In a descriptive and polemic book of collected stories of adoption, Ann Morris (1999) brings the various versions of loss to the fore. One of the adoptee's stories is particularly moving;

"I don't know anything, really, about my natural parents, and that upsets me a lot. It's hard to know the difference between what I remember and what I've been told. Sometimes I make up stories about my early childhood, about those first 13 months, because I just desperately want to have a part of my life that's entirely mine, my very own. Being adopted, I often feel that everything I've got, including my name, has been given to me by my adoptive parents. I need to feel that I came to my parents with something that was already mine" (Morris 1999:192)

Similarly, Dusky (1996) writes of her moving experiences as a birth mother;

“I was a mother without a child. I was a mother who searched for her daughter’s face in those children at shopping malls, in Central Park, anywhere children her age might be. The world was a giant stage upon which, at any moment, our paths might cross, our lives intersect. But would I recognize her? That was the question. Improbable, of course. Almost certainly crazy. I’ve talked to enough women like myself to know that this is what we all do” (Dusky, 1996:3)

The adoptive parents face their own challenges as outlined by this statement from Mitchard (1996) writing about her thoughts about the birth parent;

“Mother’s day is not the only time I think of her, but it’s the only time I can’t avoid it. She was going to have a child but couldn’t keep it. I wanted a child desperately but couldn’t have one. She was the mother at birth; I was the mother right after. It sounded simple, but it wasn’t”. (Mitchard, 1996:71)

The adoption literature often refers to the adoption ‘triangle’ of adopted child, adoptive parents and birth parents. In its simplest form the adoption triangle (Treacher and Katz 2001, Triseliotis et al 1997) contains at least an adoptee, a birth parent and an adoptive parent who all have unique challenges to their own development and loss to work with.

In the current practice of adoption, which includes many kinds of placement other than infant adoption, it is true to say that the basic triangle might be even more complicated. There will be relationships with foster carers or extended family members who may have cared for the child and developed attachments after the removal from the birth parents but before the adoption.

The Office for National Statistics 2012 presented statistical details of adoption in the period 2010-11. The average age at the point of adoption was three years and ten months. The time taken between the decision to place for adoption and the actual placement is considered a key indicator in adoption. It was within 12 months for 72% of

the children i.e. 28% waited longer and this will have complicated many of their attachments.

Looked after children in the community move on average three times before becoming 18 years old (Moyers and Mason, 1995). Some research on very young children revealed that over a quarter of babies who were looked after had experienced the equivalent level of movement before their first birthdays (Ward, Munro, Dearden, 2006). It is not unusual for looked after children to experience three placements in the course of a year (DfES, 2006).

It is clear then that the child may not exist in a simple triangular set of attachments. Within the literature of adoption the 'triangle' is often referred to but in reality the range of significant people and carers may form a complex geometric shape with many more aspects than the three commonly thought of (Hindle and Shulman 2008, Rustin, M.E. 1999).

There is no doubt that the child's inner world is impacted by the often complex familial structures created during the process to adoption. This might include extended birth family and previous foster carers, as well as the child's adoptive family. These earlier relationships have an effect on the new adoptive relationship and in particular how it can be perceived and taken in by the child.

However, if we return to the basic adoption triangle with a view to understanding the psychological tasks of the participants, Brinich 1980 describes the challenge to the *adoptee* in the adoption process in this way.

"The adopted child must include two separate sets of parents within his representational world. He must also integrate into his representation of himself the fact that he was born to one set of parents but has been raised by another set of parents". (Brinich, 1980:108)

The *birth* parent gives up a child having been through the psychological and physiological experience of pregnancy and birth. The losses involved in such a trauma have been less well researched than other areas of adoption. Those who have explored this area (Aloi 2009, A.B. Brodzinsky 1990, 1992, De Simone 1996, Triseliotis, Feast

and Kyle 2005, Wiley and Baden 2005) suggest that there is evidence of substantial risk of mental health problems in the long term for mothers who relinquish their children for adoption. Digesting the loss of a child one has carried physically for 40 weeks involves a substantial task of mourning.

A.B. Brodzinsky writes about some of the studies of birth parents...

“... the considerable anecdotal data gathered by each of these investigators is consistent with previous professional documentation of profound and protracted grief reactions, depression, and an enduring preoccupation with and worry about the welfare of the child among these woman”. (Brodzinsky, A.B. 1990:304)

The *adoptive* parents also have a complex task with many dimensions and requiring much psychological work.

“A primary task for the prospective adoptive parents is gradually letting go of the biological parenthood identity in preparation for taking on the identity of adoptive parent. At the heart of this process is ‘working through’ the deeply personal and painful experience of infertility. Although it is unlikely that infertility is ever completely resolved, it is important for the individual or couple to find a comfortable way of incorporating this painful loss into a healthy and functional sense of self”. (Brodzinsky, D.M. et al 1990:22)

Not all adoptive parents are facing infertility. However it could be argued that adopting a child necessarily involves giving up the *potential* biological child.

In short, the essential triangle of adoption appears to be built upon foundations deeply embedded in loss and mourning.

### Context and research

Adoption has changed enormously in the past 20 years (Biehal, Ellison, Baker and Sinclair 2010, Cole and Donley 1990, Rushton 2004, Wrobel and Neil 2009). The

legalisation of abortion in 1967, better access to contraception and the decreasing stigma of single parent families have all led to a decrease in the number of children available for adoption.<sup>1</sup> Adoption practice today includes open adoption (some contact with birth parents) and closed adoption (no contact with birth parents), the adoption of older children, children with special needs, inter-country and inter-racial adoption. This rich pattern of adoption today has many consequences. In particular it has made research and general conclusions about the outcome of adoption per se very difficult (Brodzinsky et al 1998, Palacios 2009).

Indeed many criticise the methodologies behind much of the accepted research precisely because it compares very different groups. There is an assumption of homogeneity that is not based in reality. It is a fact that infant adoption outcome is very different for those late placed adopted children (Biehal, Ellison, Baker and Sinclair 2009, 2010, Rushton 2003b, 2004, Wilson 2004) but many studies have lumped them together. For example, the dynamics of same race infant adoption from a birth mother with good ante-natal care will have a very different quality compared with an inter-racial late adoption of a child with special needs and a long history of adversity and fostering breakdown.

Despite this, some have asserted that there is something inherently pathological in adoption. In extremis these arguments seem to suggest that not living with your birth mother will inevitably lead to mental health problems (Verrier 1993). Others have posited the existence of an 'adopted child syndrome' (Kirschner 1990). This model presents adoption as a factor, which *on its own* will cause a number of observable behavioural and emotional types.

The relationship between adoption and pathology is keenly debated (Brand and Brinich 1999). While it is true that adoptees are over represented in child mental health agencies (Brinich and Brinich 1982, Brodzinsky 2011, Juffer and van IJzendoorn 2005) and may have vulnerabilities (Rutter 2000), the reasons for this are still unclear. The position of some is to argue that the pre-adoption experiences of early adversity are more likely to

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<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 2011 a row broke out in Parliament when the latest statistics from the Department of Education showed that only 60 babies had been adopted in the year 2010/11. This figure may however reflect the appearance of the option of 'Special Guardianship' from the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and formally introduced in 2005 (Louise Hocking 2012).

be the cause of disturbance (Kenrick, Lindsey and Tollmache 2006). Some others argue that the system and process of adoption is more likely to lead to referral to child mental health agencies (Brinich and Brinich 1982). For example, contact with the professionals of social services and adoption agencies inevitably entails a higher chance of being referred on to mental health agencies. Jeffrey 1962 suggests that the higher socio-economic status of adopting families make them more likely to refer to child mental health clinics. Could it also be that the adoptive parents have 'leap-frogged' into parenthood with adoption agency help and are thereby more open to 'outside' agency help? (Weir 2004 and see chapter 8.)

However, many of the recent reviews of the research available tentatively conclude that although adopted children are over represented in child mental health clinics, the institution of adoption is not *necessarily* pathological. For example,

"Results of controlled epidemiological and longitudinal studies, Lipman et al 1992, conclude that only a small subset of adopted children have socioemotional problems; thus, most adopted children adjust well". (Cohen 2003:374)

Even the groups of children who are more at risk seem to do relatively well in adoption. Rushton et al 2003 wrote about their one year follow-up study of late placed adopted children and concluded that

"... new parents reported that 73% of the children had formed an attached relationship with one or both parents by the end of their first year in placement." (Rushton, Mayes et al 2003:389)

The subjective accounts of adoption, as distinct from those based on strict research criteria of success, can also suggest that adoption mostly works. The self-reports of adoptees and adopting families often record positive outcomes even if the experience has included turbulent times (Groze 1996). For example Howe (1996) in a retrospective study based on interviews with the adoptive parents and adopted children who had grown up (sample group included 100 adoptees aged 23 or older), found that 76% noted a positive relationship with their children both as adolescents and adults. Positive reviews were made by 17% of the adoptive parents who had a poor relationship with

their children in adolescence but who now had a good relationship with them as adults. Negative reviews were given from only 7% of the sample that had poor relationships with the children in adolescence and adulthood.

So despite the often gloomy picture painted by some about adoption and pathology, it seems that compared with the alternatives and including the subjective experience of the participants, adoption is more an opportunity than a black hole of ultimate failure. Zamostny, K. et al 2003 capture this in their conclusion;

"In general, these perspectives on adoption outcome - that is, comparing adoptees to children raised in child welfare environments, disruption rate research and subjective ratings of post adoption success - provide evidence for the overall success of adoption. However, outcome research focused on questions of adoption risk and adjustment present a more complex picture". (Zamostny, K. et al 2003:663)

Adoption research is at an interesting point in its development. A recent collection of research findings for a conference (ICAR-2<sup>2</sup>) and subsequent book (Wrobel and Neil 2009) suggested that adoption was a successful intervention.

"The improvements in developmental outcomes for adopted children justify adoption's place in the range of permanency options for children in need. Even children adopted from the poorest backgrounds often experience very positive adjustment." (Wrobel and Neil, 2009:318)

We know that adopted children fare better than children in institutions and probably better than children in long term foster care (Rushton 2004, Triseliotis 2002, van IJzendoorn and Juffer 2006). We know that age at placement and experiences of early adversity are significant factors in adoption breakdown (Biehal, Ellison, Baker and Sinclair 2010, Palacios and Brodzinsky 2010).

However, many questions remain. For example, the general literature does not give us a clear understanding of *why* some adopted children do well whilst other adoptees display seriously disturbed behaviour (Brodzinsky et al 1998). Some children start with

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<sup>2</sup> The second International Conference on Adoption Research was held in Norwich in 2006

outrageously poor experiences of life and go on to prosper in adoptive families. Some children have had apparently less to deal with psychologically but cannot quite move on to fully use the opportunity of adoption. This idea has been explored in the psychoanalytical concept of 'double deprivation' (Henry 1974). In her classic paper this Child Psychotherapist utilises the ideas of psychoanalysis about defence against pain which paradoxically deprive the child further. From this question above and Gianna Henry's (AKA Gianna Williams) proposed answer, we see the potential applicability of psychoanalytic concepts.

### Applicability of Psychoanalytic Concepts

The preceding sections have introduced the complexities of the psychology of adoption and the research literature, it is clear that an inter-personal and intra-personal approach is needed. The subjective nature of the experiences within the adoption triangle needs to be gathered. A 'tick box' structure of analysis misses crucial parts of the essence of adoption and in particular, the importance of personal narrative and the need to find meaning in human relationships (Treacher and Katz 2000). The first part of the research question emerged from this. The task was therefore to explore the value of psychoanalytic concepts to fully understand the adoption experience.

### The searching phenomenon

As the research question grew organically, another important feature of adoption came to the fore. The literature and the narratives quickly pointed to the searching phenomenon that is part of adoption. The manner in which the adoptee, the birth parents and the adoptive parents are all psychologically interlinked became a clear communication from the material collected in both the research interviews and the literature surrounding adoption. This manifested itself in both physically activated searching but also intra-psychic searching. Each member of the adoption triangle held the others in mind. This was often with a sense of puzzlement but often with a sense of dread.



### Literature as an illuminator of adoption.

Many writers of fiction have been fascinated by the stories of adoption (Brinich, 1990a, Howe 2009, Novy 2004, 2007). As this research progressed, I was increasingly interested not only in the autobiographies of the members of the adoption triangle<sup>3</sup> but also the storyteller's version in prose. Our fascination with tales of adoption is reflected in many author's work. It became clear to me that novelists were describing something very important about the adoption experience.

### Personal journey.

The manner in which this research question germinated in my own mind also needs to be outlined. In the tradition of 'thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke 2006) there is a need for the researcher to be clear with themselves about their own interests and prejudices etc. My interest in substitute families began when I was a very young child and my father took me to visit children's homes and foster families whilst he was a Social Worker in Scotland. In retrospect I can see that he wanted me to understand life from many different dimensions. I was growing up in an intact and loving family with two parents committed to family and spiritual life. I met and played with many children in different stages of leaving their birth families and on their way to some kind of permanence. It left me with a lasting sense of gratitude for my own family experience and a fascination with the process of adoption. Even as a young child I was aware at some level of the rupture and healing necessary for this psychological journey. This partly explains my choice of career in Social Work and then in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy and has certainly influenced my search for an understanding of the adoption processes.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a vast literature of autobiographical approaches to adoption. At times they are stridently anti adoption social workers but many are well written psychological accounts of loss and identity from the birth, adoptee and adoptive perspective. Arguably the best of them are Harding 2006, Harris 2012, Holloway 2006, Morris 1999, Wadia-Ells 1995, Winterson 2011.

### Clinical experience of adoption

Throughout my clinical work I have had many experiences of working with people impacted by adoption. This has included adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents in lots of different stages of development. Adoption related cases have always intrigued me and this has no doubt shaped the development of this research question. I would like now to present a typical clinical case that includes adoption. This case is of course anonymised and only the main themes from many rich clinical hours spent with the family and the children are presented.

Ed was the first child of a stormy marriage. The couple generated lots of heat as they broke up and re-formed many times. Both the white working class parents were described as emotionally immature and the mother had spent a period in care herself. Social Workers were heavily involved when Ed's brother Joe was born 2 years later and the family unit did not cope very well. There were allegations that the children were being physical abused and neglected. After investigation both children's names were placed on the Child Protection Register (made subject of a Safeguarding Plan). The volatile relationship between mother and father appeared to take increasing amounts of mother's energy and the professional system around the family was worried about her decreasing capacity to be attuned to the children.

Mother and father suddenly disappeared and abandoned the children. They were missing for many months, never saw their children again face to face and left two traumatised little boys aged 3 and 1. Social Services placed the two boys in foster care (just one placement) and eventually sought to place the children for adoption.

It was clinically significant that the parents who adopted these children both came from high achieving but dysfunctional families and had psychologically distanced themselves from their fathers. They learned of their infertility shortly after they formed a couple. It led them to explore adoption and they eventually adopted Ed and Joe when they were 5 and 3 respectively.

The referral for psychotherapy was made when, at the age of 7, Ed's temper tantrums, theft and lies became a source of worry to the family and the school. Clingy and controlling, Ed would find it difficult to make friendships and was often out-smarted by his more mature peers. Given that the psychological task was for them to attach to each other as an adoptive family, it seemed much more important and effective to firstly work with the adoptive couple. Monthly consultations with termly parallel family meetings began. This first phase of the work explored the couple's formation, the working through of infertility and adaptation to adoptive parenthood.

The couple often talked about their deep need for 'family life' and the impact of the loss of this through infertility. Much work had already been done in the adoption selection process, but even after the children were adopted it was clear that there was unresolved loss. As we progressed, more and more information about intergenerational loss was explored. The 'ghosts' of the birth parents were present in many ways in most of these sessions.

After 12 months of this work we collectively felt that the couple had managed to weather the initial storms the children could create. They both reported feeling more resourced to assist Ed and Joe with their own losses now that they had painfully articulated their own loss and many of their preoccupations about the child's inheritance from the birth parents.

At around this time Ed started to ask for his own time to 'talk about his worries'.

From almost the very start of the sessions it was difficult to get Ed into the therapy room. Despite being 8 and able to separate for school, Ed found this too difficult for individual therapy. (In retrospect perhaps this was a clue about the nature of his triangular psychological thinking.) After much thought and supervision, I made the unusual decision to include the adoptive mother in the

room and review regularly with father. This arrangement lasted for 12 months of weekly therapy.

From almost the very start of this work Ed verbally attacked me. “Fathead, stupid, old fashioned nosy smelly fart”! These and other verbal attacks were a part of most sessions. There was a pattern of resistance to coming to the room. After a few months he was able to find ways of gaining control. He would play obvious games of hide and seek in the waiting room (where there was literally nowhere to hide). In this way he was able to be in charge enough to allow himself to enter therapy.

There were many moments during the 12 months when I would respond to his communications about his loss by talking about this feeling. As soon as I tried to talk about these feelings that he had so clearly *just* told me about, Ed would increase his verbal attacks. At times it became so difficult for him that he would fly out of the room and threaten me with any object that he could find in the clinic. Mother and I acted as a tag team to de-escalate these moments and usually we managed to have some kind of conversation about how hard all of this was for Ed.

Mindful of the adoption process and the complex transition from rejecting birth parents to nurturing adoptive parents, I was often struck by Ed’s reaction to any mention of his biological parents by me. *He* could refer to them, *he* could bring in little stories and his life story book with them prominently in it, but I was never to even say their names.

I began to see week after week that Ed was internally working on his identity of being the son of his adoptive mother and was rejecting me as standing for the (literally) abandoning birth parents. The triangular nature of this was clear. He needed to be in control of me in the way that he had not been in control of his birth parents. He protected himself from me and my imperfections. If I was a few minutes late or had to cancel a session, this confirmed my unreliability and my

treachery. It often took us months to regain a therapeutic alliance after these rare events.

This ebb and flow went on for months as Ed found ways of being a baby with his adoptive mother in the room and rejecting me verbally and physically.

Generally, Ed's play was rather limited but there were a few occasions when it leapt into communicative life. For example, once he bisected the room with a partition made of sellotape. His creation allowed him to regress and be an infant on his mother's lap whilst I was locked in the sellotape prison for not doing my job. In his mind I was the abandoning birth parent and he was rejecting me in order to form a fresh relationship with his adoptive mother.

There was a watershed session around 9 months<sup>4</sup>. The tone of the session is different from the start. This little boy's play had largely been staccato and constantly changing. He would seem dissatisfied and distracted in his brief and constantly changing interaction with toys. However, on this day, he made a den under the table and draws for the very first time. His drawing replicates an image of himself with his birth parents from a photograph in his life story book. He develops the theme by talking about a little girl (Madeleine McCann) who was taken away from her mummy and daddy and might be in Morocco. I try to find a space to talk about loss in a way that does not trigger massive verbal attacks. I begin to think that I have blundered into his pain again when he lapses into silence. However he is making something with balloons that he has smuggled into the session.

He sharpens a pencil and demands that I burst the balloons. To my surprise he has inserted little notes that fall into my lap. In not very good spelling, Ed has written many messages about his birth parents. We have the first proper conversation about how hard it has been for him to find the words etc. How hard it has been for him to move away from an ever present expectation of

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<sup>4</sup> The human gestation period is approximately nine months. I would suggest that this is significant in the development of a therapeutic relationship that is exploring parental abandonment.

abandonment from his birth parents. His preoccupation with the triangle of his birth parents and his adoptive parents came to the fore.

Psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapists will see the transferences in this brief description of a complex case. They will see easily that I often stood for the rejecting birth parents who had to be controlled and managed. However the impact of this research has made it clear that every member of the adoption triangle is preoccupied with each other in a very significant way. Ed was in a transference relationship with me but he was also wrestling with the relationship between his adoptive parents and his birth parents. His exclusion of me whilst he played with his adoptive mother in the room suggested this strongly<sup>5</sup>. The previous work with the adoptive couple also seems to have been an important piece of the jigsaw. The adoptive couple's fears about the impact of the birth parents were explored. This prior work and acknowledgement of the triangular nature of the dynamics was very important in helping Ed.

Working with the transference in the therapeutic relationship is crucial to permanent inner world change (Strachey 1937). However, there are other important and related dynamics. The adoptee in this case placed me clearly in the transference as standing for his birth parents. In addition it was clear that the adoptee was pre-occupied with the relationship with his adoptive parent and *also* their relationship with the birth parents.

Like three dimensional chess, each one of the triad members is in a relationship consciously and unconsciously, in the present and in the past, in fantasy (phantasy<sup>6</sup>) and in reality with the two others of the adoption triangle. These relationships are located at a primitive / early developmental point. This will be explored in more detail in the later chapters.

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5 The transference perspective is of course a subtle way of seeing clinical material. It could be argued that I also stood for the adoptive father in this case.

6 I will use the tradition of using the term 'fantasy' to refer to conscious mental activity and 'phantasy' which refers to less than conscious mental activity (Bateman and Holmes 1995, Rycroft 1968)

## Conclusion.

At the start of this chapter I suggested that George Eliot's fictional character of Daniel Deronda had faced the search for his biological roots in a life and mind-enhancing manner. This achievement was all the more remarkable given that adoption is steeped in loss and mourning. The available research seems to suggest that most adoptees are able to gain significantly from being adopted (Rushton 2004, Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer 2006, Wrobel and Neil 2009) but that there are particular groups of adopted children that are higher risk (Rushton 2003a). Many of these factors of risk have been well defined and described but in an important way there are still mysteries surrounding the successes and failures of adoption.

Adoption stories are human, complex and often contradictory. What does it feel like to grow up in a family with whom you have no blood tie? What does it feel like to know that the child you gave birth to is unknown to you? What does it feel like to love a child with whom you have no genetic similarity? Psychoanalysis is an important tool in this area of finding the deep adoption stories and understanding them. Capturing the narratives of the adoption triangle and closely studying the context became crucial

Fiction writing about adoption contributed to the development of the research question. The added contribution of the creative author to the inner world exploration of the adoption triangle was included.

The searching phenomenon also came to the centre stage as this research evolved. It became very clear that as each member of the adoption triangle related to the reality and fantasy (phantasy) of the others, a psychoanalytic exploration could be productive.

The research task evolved into this four part question.

### The research question

- 1) What degree of congruence is there between core psychoanalytic concepts and the experience and preoccupations of the occupants of the adoption triangle?  
Does the map fit this particular terrain?
- 2) How do writers of fiction illuminate the central themes of adoption and in what way are they congruent with psychoanalytic ideas? How do they represent the phenomenon of searching in the adoption triangle?
- 3) What does close psychoanalytic study of all three corners of the adoption triangle reveal about their relationships to each other psychically and in the real world? What does it reveal about their relationship to each other and to the phenomenon of searching?
- 4) How does the close study of both particular research subjects in the adoption triangle and the selected literature better elucidate the distinct features of the adoption experience?



## **Chapter Two**

### **Methodology.**

“Though we are aware that any knowledge at which we arrive is the result of a process on our part, we do not reflect on the nature of the process – at any rate in any systematic way – and make it the object of a special study. But sooner or later knowledge of our mistakes and the desire to be sure that we are getting the genuine article, i.e. something that is really knowledge, lead us to reflect on the process. We do so, prompted by the hope that we can discover the proper process, i.e. that in which we shall be safe from error, or at least to determine within what limits we can carry out such a process. But in the end we find ourselves having to ask whether we are capable of knowing at all and are not merely under the illusion of thinking that we can know” (Prichard, 1932:151)

### **Introduction.**

Pritchard is writing philosophically about the difficulty of really ‘knowing’. His emphasis on the *process* of gaining knowledge is important. Adoption is a complex interplay of external and internal factors and the process of researching adoption will need to be thought about. It seems a relevant place to start in the search for a methodology which will allow us access to the complex subjective area of loss and mourning that is inherent in adoption.

The last chapter described the genesis and development of the research question. It argued that the apparent ‘success’ of adoption was a complicated area steeped in mourning for all involved in the adoption triangle. It was implied that it was not best accessed solely by simple statistical collection of facts that surround the phenomenon.

In Freudlich’s (2002) examination of the state of adoption research, she suggests that it is not uniform.

“The effects of adoption on members of the triad (birth parents, adopted individuals, and adoptive parents) have been the subject of research for many years. The nature and scope of that research, however, have varied significantly, reflecting not only the realities of research interest but social values and professional concerns related to the practice of adoption” (Freudlich, 2002:143)

From the standpoint of academic developmental psychology, Palacios (2005, 2009) has also argued that the complex psychological nature of adoption needs a much more sophisticated approach than the early simple outcome studies in the field.

“... psychological research about adoption has been encumbered by an overemphasis on comparing adopted with nonadopted children. Undoubtedly, such comparisons are appropriate and provide very valuable information. However, the results from these comparisons inadequately reflect the complexities of adoption, largely because of the type of design and the comparison measurements used in the research. Moreover, it is uncertain whether the type of information obtained from comparisons between adopted and nonadopted children is very useful for adoptive families, adopted children, and the professionals who interact and work with them” (Palacios and Sanchez-Sandoval, 2005:117)

It is important to understand the process of gaining knowledge as Pritchard suggested. It is important to understand the context of knowledge as Palacios has suggested. It is also crucial that the right question and methodology is utilised. Furthermore we must ask what the knowledge is for. Wrobel writes:

“The methodology used to study adoption reveals the phenomenon in different ways. For example, quantitative follow-up of intercountry adopted children can report on children’s physical, behavioural and educational development but only qualitative research can reveal what it might feel like, for example, to be a Columbian child brought up by white Dutch parents in a small country town, and it is qualitative data that can reveal why and how various quantifiable effects occur. The ‘outcomes’ of adoption also differ if we ask the question ‘outcomes for whom?’ and it is important to consider how adoption affects not just children but also the adoptive and birth families and indeed wider society” (Wrobel and Neil 2009:xv, preface)

This methodology chapter will describe the nature of the research task and the logic of the methodology chosen. The raw nature of the losses in the adoption triangle suggest that the methodology has to be capable of finding and withstanding the *emotionality* of the relationships in adoption which are being formed in the present whilst mourning the past. The reciprocal and multi-layered nature of adopted children's relationships with adults, the heady mix of past, present and future and the powerful influence of fantasy (and phantasy) embedded in the adoption process present the researcher with a difficult task, namely, to design a methodology which can do justice to these complex aspects.

### Evidence Based Practice.

The various methodologies of psychoanalytic psychotherapy research are hotly debated in these days of evidence based practice. Sackett et al, 1996, in a brief but influential paper in the British Medical Journal described the evolving healthcare scene of evidence based practice (EBP) succinctly as

“...the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence-based medicine means integrating individual, clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research”. (Sackett et al, 1996:71)

This straightforward and sensible approach to EBP seems to be un-provocative. It has however been used to mask many an attack on disciplines that have different means of identifying evidence and understanding it (Tarrier 2002).

Many have argued that the standard approaches to evidence gathering in the “hard” sciences do not properly fit the psychoanalytic psychotherapies. The nature of what constitutes evidence is problematic for researchers looking at clinicians who work in sequestered and specialised therapeutic relationships. Many senior clinicians working in this field have contributed to the thinking. Indeed whole issues of prestigious journals,

books, reports and watershed conferences have been dedicated to the nature of evidence in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy<sup>7</sup>.

The defenders of psychoanalytic psychotherapy have made coherent defences of it as a rigorous discipline in part by questioning the hegemony of empirical epistemology. M.J. Rustin has argued in various places (1991, 1997, 2001, and 2003) that the appearance of alternative epistemologies makes the adherence to strict forms of empiricism untenable. In this way M.J. Rustin builds the argument for the scientific underpinning of psychoanalysis. In his 1991 book he puts the point that all scientific endeavours need to be contextualised;

“It seems impossible to formulate a coherent model of science based on direct observations alone, as opposed to inferences from the observed effects of structures. All perception depends on choices of material and physiological effects emanating from phenomena which are known only through effects”. (Rustin, 1991:127)

Despite the recognition that the ‘fact’ as absolute is probably chimerical, the evidence base practice literature at times seems to imply that near certainty based on statistical probabilities can be achieved. Quantitative approaches have at times been in the ascendancy. However it could be argued that this does not capture the rich layers of meaning central to therapeutic work. A leading outcomes researcher writes;

“...the employment of multivariate statistical methods for studying large numbers of cases requires preselection of categories for investigation on the basis of which all cases will be evaluated, results in a statistical averaging of findings, a sacrifice of the individuality specific to cases, and a loss of the kinds of qualitative distinctions which are the essence of psychoanalysis. This is precisely what concerned Freud (1933) about large scale studies” (Bachrach 1995:292)

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<sup>7</sup> For example, 1) 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis 1994, "The Conceptualisation and Communication of Clinical Facts in Psychoanalysis" edited by David Tuckett, 2) Psychotherapy Research Vol. 9, No. 3, 1999, "Qualitative Research on psychotherapy", 3) Journal of Child Psychotherapy August 2003, 4) UCL/International Psychoanalytic Association's Joseph Sandler Research Conference 2000, "Qualitative Methods in Psychoanalytic Research, 4) Midgley, Anderson et al 2009 5) Kennedy 2004 6) Kennedy and Midgley 2007. 8) Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Vol 24, Issue 4 2010.

Certain methods of collecting facts are thought to be better than others. Although the tide may be changing slightly and the language moves from “validating” to “supporting” (Richardson 2001) the mainstream view is of a hierarchy of research models. Within this hierarchy, the Department of Health documentation in this area is very clear that “randomised controlled trials” (RCTs) are the ultimate test of research (Department of Health 1998 and 2004).

### The nature of evidence.

The logic and appeal of RCTs is not hard to understand. It gives the impression of certainty and can often be presented in an idealised manner. In an era of shrinking resources and a particular form of risk management, the RCT has become part of a trend to homogenise human relationships. For example the language of research design often refers to RCTs as the ‘gold standard’.

Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy as a discipline does not come from a research background (Hodges 1999, Midgley et al 2009, Midgley and Kennedy 2011) and the tradition of focussing on the material in detail as it unfolds in a transference relationship has created an environment in which the anonymised single case study has been the most common form of communication. Rich and rewarding though these can be, there are also limitations in this approach to evidence gathering and evidence analysis. Klumpner and Galatzer-Levy (1991) summarised the methodological problems for the American Psychoanalytic Association. They described the case study approach as generally presenting the evidence in incomplete ways and in a form which excludes alternative interpretations.

As Roth and Fonagy (1996) point out, single-case studies have a number of attractive features. They can be carried out quickly and efficiently in routine clinical practice and do not require complex research models. However they also describe the limitations...

“... their results can be difficult to generalise to the broader clinical population... Patients are often highly selected... More fundamentally, however, interpretation of the results is limited by the fact that... therapeutic interventions have both general and specific impacts on the welfare of patients. A contrast intervention is required in order to be clear that any demonstrated benefits are attributable to specific therapeutic techniques – a strategy adopted in the randomised control trial” (Roth and Fonagy 1996:17)

The RCT is often regarded as the ultimate research design for demonstrating a relationship between cause and effect.

“...the inherently experimental design of the RCT affords greater confidence than other designs in the inferred causal relationship between the independent variable (treatment) and the dependent variable (outcome)” (Richardson, 2001:162)

In essence the RCT is specifically designed to address questions about the comparative value of two or more treatment packages. Patients are randomly assigned to different forms of intervention with an attempt to control identified factors such as demography, symptomatology etc. The provision of therapy is standardised (therapist’s level of experience, length of treatment etc) and active treatments are set alongside control groups that may include comparison with no treatment, waiting lists or a placebo intervention.

The RCT is however not entirely without flaws. Indeed the recent chair of National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has argued for a much more pluralist approach.

“Hierarchies of evidence should be replaced by accepting – indeed embracing – a diversity of approaches. This is not a plea to abandon RCTs and replace them with observational studies. Nor is it a claim that the Bayesian approach to the design and analysis of experimental and observational data should supplant all other statistical methods. Rather, it is a plea to investigators to continue to develop and improve their methodologies; to decision makers to avoid adopting entrenched positions about the nature of evidence; and for both to accept that the interpretation of evidence requires judgement.” (Rawlins, 2008:586)

There have been more focused criticisms of the RCT. Firstly, it is clearly divorced from clinical practice. In order to randomise allocation to treatment packages, the patient must consent and it could easily be argued that those who agree will not be typical of the clinical population. Secondly, the impact of the knowledge of allocation by chance should not be minimised in the arena of psychological treatments. If Child Psychotherapists work with the children and families for whom unthinking and casual abandonment has been part of their experience, it is not at all fanciful to think that the inherent lottery of the RCT will confirm loss at a very significant level. This could have an impact on treatment outcomes. Thirdly, the very act of controlling for identified factors and selecting only a particular sample group will exclude the majority of cases that have elements of co-morbidity. The pure forms of mental distress described in the literature are not often seen in busy mainstream generic clinics. Pure forms of adoption are just as rare (Howe 2009).

Midgley (2004, 2009, 2011) suggests that recently there has been a renewed interest in qualitative research in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy (Anderson 2003, Philips 2009, Urwin 2009, Hodges et al 2009). He argues that recent developments have allowed clinicians to grasp the difficulties of capturing the levels of specificity and complexity of psychotherapeutic work whilst avoiding the pitfalls of single case approaches and being systematic enough to generate hypotheses. (Krahn et al 1995, McLeod 2001)

The terrain I wish to research does not lend itself to randomised controlled trials. However neither does the single case study approach offer the systematic gathering of data which will allow competing themes to emerge. In the complex world of adoption where the *subjective* meaning of experience and relationships are crucial, the qualitative perspective is essential.

I have chosen a systematic and inductive approach to a small number of cases which can generate hypotheses that are embedded in the data itself. As observation and understanding dialectically interact, theory can be generated. The methodology for this research is one that will allow a naturalistic approach to include the wide range of textures that the many layered relationships in adoption manifest.

### Triangulated data.

I have chosen to triangulate (Campbell and Fiske 1959, Denzin 1970) data from three very different sources. (See appendix 1) Triangulation is a qualitative research method of approaching a topic from a number of different directions. In Denzin's (1970) terms this is specifically 'methodological triangulation' in that the three sources of data have different methods for gathering material. The Denzin sub-category of 'between-method' also fits this research in that the three sources are very different from each other. Finding consistent themes with different tools in different areas, strengthens the authority of the evidence. In this piece of research it also allows me to compare and contrast data in different registers.

#### Source one:

The psychoanalytic perspective on the field of adoption is rich and wide (Hindle and Shulman 2008, Hunter 2001, Hushion, Sherman and Siskind 2006, Kenrick, Lindsey and Tollemache 2006). Much has been written about the essential tasks for all in the triangle when the adopted child moves from one set of parents to another. The transformation has been dissected from many different perspectives and has been a vibrant palette for poets, authors and playwrights (Howe 2009). The loss of continuity with the past is often described and the need by the participants to understand and digest the process is often commented upon. The phenomenon of 'searching' is a leitmotiv running throughout this literature (Bertocci and Schechter 1991, Dalley and Kohon 2008, Schechter and Bertocci 1990, Trisiliotis 2000,).

The psychoanalytic tradition has perhaps the best theoretical tools to explore *in depth* these phenomena of adoption. Given the roots in loss and the opportunities for complicated ambivalence through the adoption process, psychoanalysis can contribute to the fuller understanding of its primitive dynamics. This section will present the literature and argue for the particular usefulness of psychoanalytic concepts. Splitting, projection, transference, family romance, Oedipal dimensions and ambivalence will be examined in detail and applied to the issues of adoption.



Source two:

What does the writer tell us about the inner world of the adoption participants? The role of writers in society to probe and lay bare the various dynamics of the human condition is well acknowledged. (Canham and Satyamurti 2003, Copley 1993, Freud, 1908, 1928, Hardy 2005, Hirsch 1975, Howe 2009, Jacobs 2008, Novy 2004, 2007, Rustin and Rustin 1987, Storr 1989, Williams and Waddell 1991). The manner in which many creative writers have described the adoption process is a valuable source of understanding of this phenomenon<sup>8</sup>. Using aspects of psychoanalytic literary criticism (Brooks 1994, Holland 1992, Jackson 2000, Kaplan 1990), the research will compare writers with very different cultural contexts but who nevertheless have much in common in their understanding of the adoption dynamic in general and searching in particular.

Bleak House, (1853) from the mature work of Dickens will be presented and the themes of adoption and searching within it will be analysed. This 19<sup>th</sup> century classic will be compared with a 21<sup>st</sup> century novel by Michael Ondaatje entitled, 'Divisadero' (2007). The author and this work in particular are deliberately chosen as it seems, on the surface, to stand in stark contrast to the Dickens' classic Bleak House. Ondaatje writes in an oblique manner and weaves in and out of the present and the past. Dickens famously wrote sequentially for episodes in magazines and is more linked to a chronology that Ondaatje has avoided. By contrasting these works, the overlaps and insights about adoption both authors had will enrich the understanding of the adoption process.

Source three:

The third source is an analysis of in-depth interviews with a sample of adults who were childhood adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents. The task of building a coherent

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed there is a web site listing the huge number of adoption related pieces of fiction. It is encyclopaedic and regularly updated as more works are published. Entitled 'Reader's Guide to Adoption Related Literature' it can be found at <http://wmlgage.com/readersguide/>

relationship between the research question, the data gathering and the data analysis depends on this qualitative model being able to capture the subtleties of human relationships described above.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) have made some important contributions to the thinking about qualitative research. Their research question was about the subjective fear of crime, however their conclusions are pertinent to research activity in general. Firstly, Hollway and Jefferson have argued that traditional survey research explicitly and implicitly carries a number of assumptions in both methodology and theory and that these assumptions are crucially wrong.

They point out that the fear of crime is not a single entity that can be accessed through one hypothetical closed question. However, even the developments of some qualitative research which aims to give more of a voice to respondents, continues to wrongly assume shared meaning. Both the traditional survey research and some forms of qualitative research appear to assume that the subjects are either ‘socially constructed and/or rationally driven’.

Hollway and Jefferson take time to argue convincingly for what they call a ‘defended subject’. This defended subject is a concept formed from psychoanalytic thinking and acknowledges the effect of defences against anxiety. In particular they are interested in how defences impact people’s action and their stories about this action. They describe their subtle approach to gathering data from people;

“The concept of an anxious, defended subject is simultaneously psychic and social. It is psychic because it is a product of a unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended against. It is social in three ways: first, because such defensive activities affect and are affected by discourses (systems of meaning which are a product of the social world); secondly, because the unconscious defences that we describe are intersubjective processes (that is, they affect and are affected by others); and thirdly, because of the real events in the external, social world which are discursively and defensively appropriated. It is this psychosocial conception of the subject which we believe is most compatible with a serious

engagement in researching the ‘what’ ‘how’ and ‘who’ issues such as fear of crime and sexuality” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:24)

In their struggle to find a nuanced way of producing data from the sophisticated and psychoanalytically perceived subjects, Hollway and Jefferson found a solution in the biographical-interpretative method. From their point of view this method had four main principles.

Firstly, unlike the traditional survey approaches which often used ‘Likert’ scales (Likert 1932) that inevitably closed down the options for answers, this approach asked questions which were as open as possible. The principle of openness in the question design is to gather the ‘meaning frame’ of the subject. Secondly, in a manner similar to the process of ‘free association’, this method elicits stories. The story that is chosen, the manner of its telling, the points emphasised and the moral drawn are all data which illuminate the meaning for the subject. Thirdly, the avoidance of ‘why’ questions rests on the concept of the defended subject. If one asks ‘why’ questions one gets the subject’s attempt to rationalise actions and not the unconscious motivations. Fourthly, this method stresses the importance of follow up using the subject’s own ordering and phrasing. In this way the researcher acts as a catalyst to the stories.

Hollway and Jefferson’s work has helped to make the logic of this investigation clearer. The data gathering and the data analysis needs to encompass the deeply complex psychology of humans in the complicated world of adoption.

#### The data set and the evolution of the analysis.

The data set came from a small sample (4x3=12) of adults from the adoption triangle recruited to represent standard adoption practice. Adoption practice is now very varied but in order to be sure that the results are representative of mainstream adoption in general, the sample did not contain adoptees who were very late placed or who have experienced extreme adversity prior to placement. It was agreed in advance that the four representatives from each of the three groups (adoptees, adoptive parents and birth

parents) were not going to be in the same adoption triangle i.e. not the relinquishing parent *and* their biological child.

(It is important to note that most of the interviewees told stories about *infant* adoption. This was not the result of the research exclusion criteria. It may have been the consequence of the manner of the recruitment into the research via social and professional networks. As described in other parts of this research ‘late placed adoptees’ have very different outcomes.)

Twelve people were interviewed in locations of their own choosing. Many were happy to be seen at home and some opted to be interviewed at their workplace. The sample candidates knew from the information and consent sheets that the researcher had a longstanding interest in adoption. They were not consciously aware of the focus on the phenomenon of searching, the use of literature or the utility of psychoanalytic concepts in adoption understanding. That is to say they were not aware of the details of the research question.

The recruitment came mostly from word of mouth and social and professional networks. Often at the end of the interview, the interviewee would recommend others to be approached. The sessions were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The approach was inspired by the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Model (Wengraf 2001) but became very different from it as the methodology organically grew.

The interview was not constructed around a question schedule. Rather, a single open question was first asked and this served as the basis for eliciting a narrative from the interviewee around the subjective experience of adoption. The single open question was “Tell me the story of your experience of adoption?”

This single open question produced an ‘initial narrative’. At the end of the initial narrative, and based on the contemporaneous notes taken, the interviewer then asked a series of questions to elicit further narratives. In order to have proper clarity about the questions, the interviewer asked to withdraw from the interviewee to process the notes. In private the hand-written notes are re-read and the initial themes become apparent.

The average length of the first part of the interview was 26 minutes and the range was between 6 minutes and 24 seconds and 51 minutes and 47 seconds (appendix 2).

Returning to the interviewee in the second part of the interview the process continued. In asking these follow up questions every effort is made to follow the order and use the words of the interviewee from the initial narrative. Using phrases from the interviewee to probe for more detailed narratives, proved to be very rewarding. Often points that were rushed were returned to with surprisingly more openness and depth. Very significant parts of the story were often told initially with speed and no emphasis. It was only when follow up questions were aimed at these points were they elaborated. Often with some pain at the recollection of the emotional state the material referred to.

By way of ending the interview a final question is asked around any other material they wish to add, thereby giving them a chance to raise issues that the interview process may have provoked. The average length of the second part was 23 minutes and the range was from 11 minutes and 42 seconds to 39 minutes and 26 seconds (appendix 2).

After the interviews but before the analysis of the interview material, the theoretical assumptions were laid out (appendix 3.) Resting on clinical experience in working with adoption and from much reading in this area, the rough expectations were written out. This exercise assisted in beginning the long process of digesting the material. It also served as a transparent statement of the researcher's assumptions. As Braun and Clarke 2006 make clear,

“... what is important is that as well as applying a method to data, researchers make their (epistemological and other) assumptions explicit.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79)

Without exception the stories were all incredibly rich. The format allowed the interviewees to have an emotional reaction to their own stories. The texts were certainly not grammatical and rarely perfectly clear. The human beings involved in the narratives of adoption contradicted themselves, tried to gloss over painful areas and generally confirmed the idea of the ‘defended subject’. The complicated truth of their experience only gradually came to the foreground.

Once transcribed and checked closely for accuracy, the material was digested in various ways many times. After each reading more notes were taken and collated. The transcriptions were read with and without the recording of the interview playing along. This researcher attempted to become extremely familiar with the depth and breadth of the material. Gradually codes and themes were loosely identified in broad terms. A preliminary grid was constructed to start to codify themes (see appendix 4).

As this process evolved it became clear that the BNIM template did not fit the task in hand. After much thought, the researcher began to develop a more ‘thematic analysis’ (Braun and Clarke 2006). The generous flexibility of thematic analysis suited the research task.

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79)

The transcriptions were analysed line by line and initial codes were generated. This time consuming task paid dividends and more and more collections of initial codes were listed. The preliminary reading and re-reading inspired a particular focus on the ‘searching’ phenomenon in adoption.

Chapter 8 will explore the process of the analysis in more detail but essentially the task became one of finding emerging themes in the narratives that could be clustered. The method for analysing the material had grown organically out of the material. Gradually over time the themes became clearer and could be evidenced with data extracts, sections of the narratives and a commentary. The commentary relied on what the interviewee had actually said but it also captured something of the impact on the interviewer. The transference and counter transference aspects were *not* explicitly used in the way that psychoanalytic psychotherapy would use them. It was however another source of understanding the subtleties of the complex and contradictory stories. The latent meaning was often in the *tone* of the delivery rather than the type face.

### **Chapter three**

#### **Psychoanalytic thinking about adoption.**

“The adopted child must include two separate sets of parents within his representational world. He must also integrate into his representation of himself the fact that he was born to one set of parents but has been raised by another set of parents” (Brinich, 1980:108)

#### **Introduction**

At this point I would like to introduce some of the important psychoanalytic concepts that can be invaluable tools in understanding the dynamics of the adoption field. Given the complexity and psychological nature of adoption, it could be argued that the psychoanalytic model is the one that allows for a full exploration of the subjective meanings of adoption. With its close examination of inter and intra personal relationships, this perspective is well placed to examine the experiences and the blocks to mourning which are necessary for growth and development in adoption.

The psychoanalytic model can also assist us to understand fully the phenomenon of searching in the adoption triangle. This will be further explored in a subsequent separate chapter.

#### **Psychoanalytic perspective.**

It has been over 100 years since Freud wrote of the application of psychoanalytical work with children in Little Hans (Freud 1909) and the subsequent explorations in psychotherapeutic work with children have been developed enormously since then (Anderson and Dartington 1998, Briggs, A. 2002, 2012, Cohen, M. 2003, Emanuel and Bradley 2008, Garland 1998, Hunter 2001, Kenrick et al 2006, Lanyado and Horne 1999, Rustin and Bradley 2008, Rustin, Rhode et al 1997, Rustin and Quagliata 2000, Waddell 1998, Williams 1998, Youell 2006). From my experience of working therapeutically with the adoption triad in various forms, I would like to suggest

that these are some of the psychoanalytic concepts and their developments which apply well to adoption.

### Splitting.

The psychoanalytic concept of splitting has much to offer those in the field of adoption (Freud 1938, Klein 1946). Like many psychoanalytic concepts it has developed as time has passed. For the purposes of understanding the dynamic of splitting in the adoption field, it might be useful to grapple with some different versions of it. With the discoveries of Sigmund Freud we came to see that the mind was not a static thing. It is not always homogenous or even constantly integrated. There are conflicts and defences within the mind that can lead to part of the mind being unavailable to other parts. A simplistic example of splitting might be found in the child who relishes the Christmas arrival of Santa Claus and all the gifts. The child might be aware at some level that it is really only a man dressed up in a symbolic suit with a beard. However, at another significant level the child will continue to entertain the idea of such a magical character and his generosity.

Psychoanalysts refer to the splitting of the ego and the splitting of the object. For the purposes of applying this thinking to adoption, we might refer to this as splitting of the self and the splitting of the other respectively. Splitting of the object or other, usually results in the parts of the other being diametrically opposed. For example, the infant who is terrified by its own vulnerability and experiencing mother as absent and thereby malevolent, might deal with this problem by psychologically splitting mother into a good mum who attends and feeds and a bad mum who does not. In this way, the problem of the reality of the mother (who can never be perfect or ideal) is dealt with by the infant. By creating a good and bad version of the mother, a split is created that allows the inner state to be dealt with.

Examples of this process can be found often in the field of adoption<sup>9</sup>. For example, children who rail against their consistent, caring and available adoptive parents and who

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed there is a substantial theme in the psychoanalytical literature dealing with adoption that refers to splitting as recurring phenomenon. Hertz 1998 and Samuel 2003 are good examples of this



idealise their abusive, absent and chaotic birth parents might be said to be splitting. They are dealing with the pain by setting up an ideal versus a denigrated relationship that is not based on reality. Perhaps in order to deal with the shock of abandonment by the birth mother, the child has to deal with this by moving away from reality testing and by splitting a bad (actually caring, boundary setting) adoptive mother from a good (in reality absent, neglectful) birth mother.

Splitting of the ego or self can often result in one of the parts being considered the only part. The split off part becomes unconscious and unknown. Many psychoanalysts describe the process of splitting off the parts of the self that are feared. From the child's perspective the destructive aspects of the self might be good candidates for splitting off if the child fears that having them will invite retaliation from stronger and more powerful others<sup>10</sup>.

Examples of this can often be seen in the adopted child who fears that his own capacity to hate might kill off his chances of being cared for. In extreme cases this splitting off of 'normal' hate and aggression might lead to a fragility of the personality and possibly outbursts of aggression, the proportions of which may surprise and terrify the child. Similarly, an adopting parent may feel that their negative feelings towards the adopted child are unacceptable. This might be particularly strong if the process of being assessed as potential adopters by Social Workers inadvertently led to a difficulty articulating a particular range of emotions. It is not difficult to imagine splitting in this hypothetical situation. The adopting parent may find that in order to tolerate certain proscribed feelings that they are unconsciously, for example, favouring one child and disliking another in an adopted sibling group. In this scenario the good child versus the bad child split allows some respite from the difficult psychological position.

The defensiveness of splitting in the face of experiences that overwhelm one, can be easily understood and observed. Many of us have had the experience of listening to a young person relate appalling experiences of abuse and humiliation with no apparent affect consistent with the narrative. The facts of the abuse are related to in a shallow or

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<sup>10</sup> Later, in chapter 6, I will argue that Charles Dickens captures this in his characterisation of Esther in *Bleak House*. In chapter 7 in a slightly different manifestation, Ondaatje's characterisation of the farmer Mr Mendez in *Divisadero* is another example of splitting.

flippant manner whilst the true impact of the awful story is split off (and often projected into the listener). This allows the young person to manage the experience with the resources they have at that time. In a healthy scenario the split off experiences will gradually, and commensurate with the child's ability to digest, become available for the child in a genuine and authentic way.

Splitting is a defence against facing the reality of emotional states which may be painful or overwhelming etc. The over-use of splitting with other defences might lead to serious mental health difficulties (for example, there is a link with certain paranoid states). However, splitting is omnipresent in normal development and the Kleinian tradition of psychoanalytic thought suggests that dealing with splits is one of the central developmental challenges in being human.

In the context of splitting the other (object), to mature is to be able to accept, for example, that the split bad mum and the good mum are, in reality, the same person. In the context of splitting the self (ego), maturation might be accepting the various aspects of oneself without disowning them.

Clearly the versions of splitting of the self and the splitting of the other may occur at the same time. Indeed some psychoanalysts argue that splitting of the other always involves some splitting of the self (Bion 1959, Hinshelwood 1989, Klein 1946, Segal 1978). Splitting can also be identified in the network of relationships between human beings. When something cannot be tolerated by a human system it is often dealt with by a splitting manoeuvre (Sprince 2000, 2008, Tollemache 2006). In the systems surrounding the adoption process when tremendous loss is being faced, there are often elements that cannot be digested and parts of the system can be split off. For example, in adoption the local authority social worker may be considered 'bad' whilst the adoption agency social worker may be seen as 'good' without an external reality to support this view. In this case, it could be a defensive ploy of the system to avoid facing the pain of the task of mourning.

#### Projection and Introjection.

The psychoanalytic concept of projection is another valuable tool of understanding in adoption and is related to the above concept of splitting (Freud 1911, Klein 1946.) It could be defined as the manner in which parts of the self are imagined to be located in some other external person. Often the precursor to projection is denial of particular emotional states or wishes. They are then projected into the other and observed as belonging to the other. There are various versions of this. One might for example project a hatred of a neighbour into a friend thus absolving you of hatred. Or one might for example project the hatred into the neighbour claiming that actually he hates you and thus again absolving you of this emotional state.

In adoption, when children have had terribly negative early experiences one can often see them use the dynamic of projection to survive. Never having had reliable relationships that will facilitate growth in the infant, the uncontained rage may be projected into others. The carers of such a child may be felt by the child to be full of rage and anger that actually originates in the child. It may have no basis in external reality but the projection from the child may be of such primitive rawness that the carers are perceived as ogres intent on annihilating the child<sup>11</sup>.

There is also an important way that projection is used for parts of the self. It is often observed that one can attribute to others what important figures have done to us in the past. In this way we might experience a loving parent and take that relationship into our inner world in a very real way. It is possible later to then project that inner relationship onto another external person. For example one might project into another and imagine that a woman loves you in the way that your mother used to.

Many stories of adoption contain evidence of this form of projection. The unloved little boy has many experiences of neglect or frank abuse and has taken this view of himself and relationships into his inner world. This then is projected onto his adoptive parents and it sabotages the opportunity of care. What happens in the past becomes not a series of historical incidents but an ongoing shaper of all relationships current and future<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Later, in chapter six, I will argue that Charles Dickens captures this in his characterisation of Richard Carstone in *Bleak House*.

<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with the preliminary findings from Hodges et al 2003, 2005. They are suggesting that past patterns are not easily superseded by new adoption relationships. They only gradually fade.

Like many other psychoanalytic concepts the idea of projection has mutated with clinical practice over the years. It is now considered to be a part of the normal process of development in children. The immature infant with its meagre psychological resources has to project its rage and fear away from itself and hopefully into a containing parent.

In healthy mother-infant dyads this projection is not overwhelming for the parent (usually but not necessarily the mother) and she contains it emotionally. The well-attuned mother is able to tolerate the rage and fury of the infant and does not retaliate. She accepts the psychologically toxic projections and finds many subtle ways to facilitate the infant's safe re-introjection of the projected states. The challenge for the mother is to intuitively know at what stage and in what form to give back the projections to the infant. When this containment works well, it is the basis of the infant's mental health.

This cycle of containment happens so often and so quickly that it can require very close observation of the process to truly see what is happening between mother and infant (Briggs, S., 1997, Miller, Rustin et al 1989, Miller 1999, Sternberg 2005). When the infant, for example, is hungry and has no resource to nurture herself or even be convinced that food will appear at all, she faces a psychological catastrophe. Absence of what the infant requires is really a threat of enormous proportions to the mind of the infant. Many parents will have witnessed the mix of terror and rage when hunger takes over. It can often become so all consuming that even when food is available, the infant may refuse it and fight against it. In this example, the mother who is attuned most of the time has some sense of what has gone wrong. She finds ways of soothing the baby, perhaps with tactile strokes of the cheek, perhaps with verbal phrases that the infant will have heard in the womb. The containing mother is not enraged by the rejection of her food. She finds a way of accepting that the infant is in trouble and experiencing emotions that it will want to get rid of. The containing mother will find a way of holding on to the state of mind of the infant and yet also find a way of letting the infant accept the food as nurture and not poison.

Many late placed adoptees will have little experience of this benign cycle of containment by parents. When the under-resourced infant does not have his projections

met with acceptance and detoxification but with retaliation and revenge, it sets up a terrible problem for the adoptee. It can confirm that the world is a scary place and cannot cope with the child's rage. This is a terrifying prospect internally and externally. The concomitant of projection is introjection. As the infant grows it takes in the relationships, events and attitudes surrounding him. The child subjectively perceives his parents and takes this inside himself in a very important manner. The perceived qualities of the people in the external world become introjected and continue to exist in the child's inner world.

This is the genesis of the super-ego. Namely the introjection of parental figures that the child can then carry with him as he attempts to make moral choices about the world. From this perspective it can be seen as one of the ways the child has of dealing with separation anxiety. By introjecting aspects of the parents into an inner world, he is less reliant on the external versions of the parents.

These concepts are valuable in thinking about adoption. We can see that the children who have had no early opportunity to introject loving and caring relationships from the external world will not be best placed to accept later relationships based on love or care. The adoptees with this set of experiences will struggle to enjoy the nurture available in the adopting family.

Knowledge of the dynamics of projection is also helpful when thinking about the others in the adoption triangle. Adopting parents may have intolerable feelings about not being able to have their own biological children (Leon 2010). Not being able to present our own parents with grandchildren can be difficult to face. Many parents in this situation describe feelings of being incomplete and deeply troubled. If these states are not carefully explored and articulated there is a possibility that this is then projected outwards. There are many case studies of this being projected into the adopted child (Bonovitz 2006, Sprince 2008). In these cases the already internally impoverished child is faced with the task of trying to deal with the unconscious projections from the adopting parents. This often leads to a breakdown of the system at some level.

Finally, in taking on the care of adopted children the adoptive parents are often at the very edge of their knowledge base and experience. Often children adopted from care

have had appalling experiences with the birth parents before being removed. In this situation it is not hard to imagine the adoptive parents being the target of projections from the damaged child. The impact of this on the adoptive parents can be considerable. Cairns (2008) wrote about this in terms of traumatised adoptees projecting into the adults and causing “secondary traumatic stress” in the family.

### Transference.

Arguably, the use of transference in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is its defining concept (Freud 1915, Klein 1952). Other psychotherapies may overlap and adapt some of the tools of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, but the central place of transference is generally thought to be its key characteristic.

From the other concepts described above we can see that the psychologically immature infant has to involve acts of splitting to deal with the reality of experience in the world. The infant will also project intolerable fears and anxieties and introject the objective and subjective relationships available to him or her. In this process the inner world forms a rich and varied internal landscape. Transference can be described as the process by which earlier relationships, thoughts and feelings are ‘transferred’ on to other relationships. It is commonly thought to be omnipresent in all relationships but in the sequestered atmosphere of the psychotherapy room, it is closely tracked and worked with.

The roots of the psychoanalytic formulation of transference began when an early colleague of Freud's called Breuer first described it as an “untoward event” in the case known as Anna O (Freud and Breuer 1893). This early collaborator described to Freud how his patient had apparently fallen in love with him. Whilst working with Anna O, Breuer hypothesised that her symptoms were associated with her memories (many of which were repressed). Her intense relationship with her father whom she had nursed through a serious illness became enacted in the transference with Breuer. When Anna O claimed that she was pregnant with Breuer's child he became alarmed and concluded that it was unethical for a medical man to be the target of such powerful feelings. Breuer stopped the treatment and left the field for Freud to puzzle over this phenomenon.

Freud's first view of transference was that it was an obstacle. He apparently used to get quite cross about the 'waste of time' as his patients elaborated their transference feelings about him and talked, for example, about imagined slights from him (Gay 1988).

Over the years he gradually became more and more interested in this phenomenon of transference. By the time he worked with the case of Dora (1905) (which was intended to be his 'best practice' case) he had moved a long way. He had high expectations of the Dora case but she broke off her psychoanalysis with him prematurely and this led him to re-examine the position of transference

He now moved from thinking that it was a barrier to the work to recognising its usefulness and built up theories to include it. Interestingly, it was not until his work with the meaning of dreams and his discovery that the unconscious could only communicate indirectly with the 'residue of the day' that he could really see that the transference was yet another way of communicating the primitive aspects of the personality (Likierman 2001).

Subsequent psychoanalytic theorists took the concept of transference further (Segal 1973). Having learnt from work with very damaged children, they built on Freud's work and pushed for a much more omnipresent version of transference. The proposed idea was now that the entire range of internal infantile relationships and mental processes could be transferred and currently experienced in relation to some person in the external world (Klein 1952, Segal 1978).

In this way the therapist comes to stand in the patient's mind for all the internal figures. All that the patient brings contains elements of the transference even from the moment he/she enters the therapeutic situation. This importantly different position means that the 'here and now' in the therapeutic setting is the meeting point of the past and the unconscious phantasy accompanying it as it expresses itself in the present.

This development of the concept of transference makes therapeutic work even more interesting and much more complex. Emphasising the ubiquitous and multi-layered

nature of this phenomenon, Henri Rey wrote that the therapist working in the transference should always be looking at “what, in what state does what, with what motive, to what object, in what state, with what consequences” (quoted in Steiner 1979). In the world of adopted children where very early relationships have been severed, one can immediately see the relevance of this tool of transference. The child who has lived with an abusing or psychologically absent parent before being removed and then placed in an adoption placement will transfer many of the features of the previous relationships on to the adopting parents. They will respond to the current features as if they were the features of the previous relationships. It is an often-articulated statement of adopting parents that they feel that they are being treated like a completely different kind of adult. Dealing with the unconscious process of transference can be emotionally draining. It is a challenge of enormous proportions to be reacted to, for example, like an intrusive sadistic tyrant when one’s own self-perception is much more benign. The tension between the two versions can have a powerful impact on one’s mental health.<sup>13</sup>

### Family Romance.

Perhaps one of the earliest psychoanalytic theorizations that lends itself to the adoption process is ‘family romance’. With his great skill for close observation, Freud was able to describe the phenomenon of the fantasy of adoption that appears in all children. In his 1909 paper “Family Romances” Freud saw that latency aged children often had ideas about being a stepchild or adoptee. As the developmental challenge of gradual separation from the parents becomes more of the central task, the child begins to imagine that his parents are not his real parents but substitutes.

Anecdotally it is at this stage that older siblings might cruelly tease the younger children about being adopted but the parents have not yet informed them. In this way the issue of separation and the seeds of criticism of the parents are explored and played with. Concomitantly, children in this developmental stage can often have fantasies of the ‘real’ parents being nobler than the ‘imposters’. Freud suggested in this paper that this

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<sup>13</sup> Later, in chapter six, I will present John Jarndyce (from Bleak House) as an interesting example of an adoptive parent in a novel. He struggles with what his adopted son Richard constantly makes of him despite his benign intentions.



was a strategic ploy to return to the subjective experience of the parents as they appeared to the child when they were younger (before the reality of the parents began the long process of ‘disillusionment’ as Winnicott described it in 1953).

Freud captured it in this way;

“Indeed the whole effort at replacing the real father by a superior one is only an expression of the child’s longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of woman. He is turning away from the father he knows today to the father in whom he believed in the earliest days of his childhood; and his phantasy is no more than the expression of regret that those happy days are gone” (Freud, S. 1909 SE 9:240)

Clearly Freud had found a manifestation of the natural ambivalence towards parents that occurs in children. The psychoanalytic tradition was perhaps the first to articulate this phenomenon clearly.

Like many psychoanalytic concepts it inter-links with many others. The family romance idea can be said to also be part of the Oedipal dimension. By experiencing a fantasy that the parents are imposters, it allows incestuous thoughts to exist by transcending the biological link. It is also linked to the area of sibling rivalry. The family romance idea allows the envious sibling to dismiss brothers and sisters as unrelated.

This concept of the family romance fantasy as part of normal development for all children is particularly helpful in thinking about children who have been adopted. We can see that the family romance concept describes the manner in which children deal with the reality of their parents and accept their sometimes painful failures by imagining another set of parents. How much more psychological work will be required from adopted children who *in reality* have another set of parents. The opportunity for imaginative playing with other types of parents that is contained in the family romance is not available in the same way. The added task of the adopted child is to approach ambivalence with less armoury.

### Oedipal dimension.

The psychoanalytic tradition has the Oedipal complex close to its heart. Freud's use of the story of Oedipus the King by Sophocles (429B.C.) illuminated something central about being human. The manner in which a child from the age of three to six deals with the intense loving feelings towards one parent and endeavours to possess that parent totally whilst having negative feelings towards the other parent is scattered throughout art and literature (Boswell 1988). It seems to capture something that appears to be nearly universal. The child has to struggle with the wish to possess incestuously and acknowledge painfully that the parental couple exists and excludes. The shutting of the bedroom door leaves the child outside and mourning the loss of the intense dyad the child wanted to form. Britton illustrates this well;

“In the phantasied tragic version of the Oedipus complex the discovery of the oedipal triangle is felt to be the death of the couple: the nursing couple or the parental couple. In this phantasy the arrival of the notion of a third always murders the dyadic relationship” (Britton, 1989:100)

However, paradoxically the parental couple's very existence is eventually the child's source of development. With optimal psychological development, children come to experience the couple as a source of benefit. The parental couple is able to help the child contain possessive and hostile feelings. As the Oedipus complex is resolved, the seeds of the conscience are grown. Indeed the growth of the mind is dependent on the internal relationships we have with the parental couple. Our personality development is based on the subjective dialogues we have with this couple throughout our lives.

Canham (2003) puts it succinctly,

“The relationship to parental figures in the mind is to mental life what the sexual union of parents is to our physical existence” (Canham, 2003:5)

In the external world of adoption however the biological couple is replaced by the adoptive couple. It is also true to say that many children adopted from care reach the point of being adopted having experienced high levels of adversity and abuse before being separated. What does this present to the adopted child's task of resolving the

oedipal challenge? The impact of this has been another important theme in the psychoanalytic literature (Bartram 2003).

One of the clearest expositions of the Oedipal dimension in the dynamic of adoption was provided by Hamish Canham (2003). He wrote about the inner world difficulties facing such children. As well as all the “normal” challenges of resolving the Oedipal complex, adopted children have to face the reality that the birth parents were at best unable to care for them, and at worst were frankly abusing them (Hindle and Shulman 2008). To face the reality of the parental couple and the couple’s sexual potential is a difficult truth for all children. How much more difficult it will be when the reality of the adopted child contains a couple which has the added painful layer of abandoning the child. Facing reality then becomes much more potentially devastating. Hamilton (1982) writes;

“For the adopted child, knowledge and the phantasies associated with knowing, are fraught with the twin dangers of incest and sterility. No blood-tie bars the sterile parents from incestuous relations; no relationship in the world outside the family is free of threat of incest”. (Hamilton, 1982:237)

Again we see that the adoptee has an extra layer of psychological work to do. If the *non adopted* child resolves the oedipal problem by facing the reality of the parental couple and internalises some version of that, how much more of a challenge will the *adopted* child face. That resolution is based on real experience of non-related adults and the knowledge that other birth parents exist and have rejected them.

In basic terms the psychoanalytic tradition suggests that the Oedipal resolution becomes the platform on which sexual identity is later formed. Adolescence is seen as the period in which young men and women explore and experiment with various versions of themselves as they individuate from the parents (Waddell 1998). The adoptee however is exploring identities and moving away from non-biological parents. It is difficult to push against parents to find one’s own identity when the exact reality of the birth parents are not known or are unclear (Brinich 1990).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Later in chapter seven I will argue that Michael Ondaatje’s character Coop in the novel *Divisadero* displays many of the problems in sexual identity that this psychoanalytic concept explains.

## Ambivalence.

The richness of the psychoanalytic view of adoption is well represented in the work of Brinich (1980, 1990a, 1990b, 1995 etc). He begins with the truth of the centrality of ambivalence in all relationships. We might attempt to define ambivalence by distinguishing it from having ‘mixed feelings’. To have mixed feelings about another person might be based on an appraisal of different parts of that person’s character. We might, for example, like their generosity but dislike their lack of boundaries.

Ambivalence is however contradictory and derived from a single root. Ambivalence is essentially the co-existence of feelings which are normally seen as being at polar ends of a spectrum, for example, love and hate.

The parallel existence of both love and hate in parent child-relationships was a psychoanalytic discovery which although well described in art and literature (Boswell 1988), had often been denied by other social strands and myths of, for example, the Victorian era notion of the purity of children’s love for their parents and vice versa. From Freud’s duality of instincts (1915a) to Abraham’s development of the categories of object relationships (1924) psychoanalysis was positing an important role for ambivalence. Later, Klein (1946) developed a much more central role for ambivalence.

The infant who struggles with feelings of love and hate towards parents may attempt to resolve the problem with many varied solutions. The infant may attempt to deny the existence of one feeling and focus solely on another. The infant may attempt to create a split with a ‘good’ mother and a ‘bad’ mother. As development and exposure takes place the infant will realise that the loved and hated mother are actually one and the same. Melanie Klein believed that negotiating this is the essential developmental task.

In the adoption setting this becomes even more psychologically complicated. The challenges can manifest themselves in terms of how to disentangle the “normal” flux of love and hate in a parenting relationship from those that might be the product of the special circumstances of adoption. In some ways the focus of an adoption could increase the likelihood of things being ‘disowned’ and subsequently becoming psychopathological symptoms.

The non-adopted child is faced with the task of facing ambivalence and somehow internalising a functional mixture, which the child can rely on. To some extent this is based on the reality of the present parents both subjectively and objectively. The *adopted child's* task is however more complicated psychologically. The adopted child has the existence of *another* set of parents and a more elaborate split is therefore possible.

Brinich (1990b) helpfully presents this schematically:

	Adopted child's feelings towards parents	
	Love	Hate
Towards adoptive parents	A	B
Towards biological parents	C	D

Figure 1

The non-adopted child in normal development will have to face this psychological challenge and negotiate an internalisation of love and hate. With the above schema Brinich illustrates the way in which adopted children can circumvent this dilemma. If the non adopted child has to find a way of combining cells A and B, the adopted child, because of the existence of the other parents, can make other combinations of, for example, A and D *or* B and C.

In A-D mode, the adoptee might idealise the adoptive parents whilst denigrating the birth parents. Whereas, in B-C mode, the adoptee might idealise the birth parents and denigrate the adoptive parents<sup>15</sup>. Often this is not based on the realities of the adoptive

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<sup>15</sup> In my experience this is even more complex in that these states are highly fluid. The adoptees will often move from A-D states of mind to B-C states of mind and back again in a few seconds.

or birth parents but a mixture of external and internal world realities. As a result of this attempted circumvention of the important developmental task of dealing with ambivalence, the adopted child has the possibility of a worrying psychological split with all the implications for future mental health difficulties.

This opportunity for avoidance and splitting is also apparent in the *adoptive parents* situation. Again Brinich (1990b) provides a useful illustration:

	Adoptive parent's feeling towards child	
	Love	Hate
Towards adoptive child	A	B
Towards fantasised biological / adopted child	C	D

Figure 2

The adoptive parents have accepted the challenge of forging A and B in this matrix. The task is to come to terms in some way with the love and hate that we might feel for our child. However the existence of the adoptive parents own loss in the form of the fantasy of the child that they never biologically conceived (or the impossible idealised well-behaved fantasy adopted child) can set up a fertile ground for splitting. Many clinicians have been witness to the presenting symptoms of adopted children described by adoptive parents in terms of cell B with a not too distant flavour of cell C existing in parallel.

Although Brinich did not extend his grid to the *birth parents*, I think that there is some value in applying it. The birth parent's experience of adoption is a loss that will last a lifetime. At each developmental stage of the birth parent and the adopted child, the loss will need to be re-negotiated. This triangular psychology of the adoption triangle will be

explored in another chapter. However the Brinich grid applied to birth parents would perhaps look like this:

	Birth parent's feeling towards adopted child	
	Love	Hate
Adoptee	A	B
Adoptive parents	C	D

Figure 3.

In Brinich's perspective, the birth parent has the difficult task of dealing with ambivalence towards their child and forging something out of love and hate. The specific challenge of the birth parent is that they are not caring for the child. The reality of the child on a day to day basis is not part of their material. Tendencies to relate to a fantasy (and/or phantasy) of the child are very strong in this arena. Unconscious hatred of the child for not being present is a possibility. The recipe for getting things terribly wrong is clear.

Similarly, the complex relationships with the adoptive parents have the very real potential for confusion. The birth parents have lost their child and they are painfully aware that another set of parents are currently caring for this child. The relief that the child is being properly looked after must oscillate with other strong feelings about wanting to take back the child and being hyper critical of the care they are giving to their child. With the State being involved with the full backing of the law, the ability to work out a balance of love and hate towards the adoptive parents is hugely difficult.

### Discussion.

In this chapter a selection of psychoanalytic concepts has been described. The application to adoption is clear. There is a significant fit between the subtlety of these

psychoanalytic tools and the complex relationships created by adoption. The intra and inter personal dimensions in adoption insists on a set of tools that can cope with this mixture of past and present, of loss and mourning and of triangular relationships. There is clearly a degree of congruence between these core psychoanalytic concepts and the experiences of the occupants of the adoption triangle. The map fits this particular terrain.



## **Chapter four.**

### A Psychoanalytic view of Searching within the Adoption Triangle

“The jigsaw can never, ever be completed. There will always be missing pieces, or the pieces will be too large and clumsy to fit into the delicate puzzle. The search is often disappointing because it is a false search. You cannot find yourself in two strangers who happen to share your genes. You are made already, though you don’t properly know it, you are made up from a mixture of myth and gene. You are part fable, part porridge”  
Kay, 2010:47

### Introduction.

From a certain perspective, adoption has evolved enormously over time. The organization of the process has always reflected changes in the society around it. Boswell (1988) described in great detail the manner in which children were often ‘adopted’ for complicated psychological and sociological reasons from early Roman times.

Triseliotis et al (1997) also took an historical perspective and determined 5 stages of the evolution of adoption. Firstly in ancient times it was often to secure inheritance lines or succession. When industrialisation started to impact the organisation of family and kinship structures, a second stage of adoption emerged based on secretive and legally binding arrangements. The third stage was described as being essentially oriented around the needs of the infertile couple. When the supply of healthy infants started to decrease and awareness of the placement possibilities for even older children with considerable difficulties increased, a fourth stage of adoption evolution was achieved. This was a much more child centred adoption process. The fifth stage described by Triseliotis et al is our current position of adoption being heterogeneous. International, transracial and intercountry adoption has sparked many fierce debates about adoption becoming adult/parent oriented again. It is however a reality that when children need care, adults will respond and cross boundaries to achieve this. (This is the glue that

keeps adoption processes going across culture and across time. The primitive emotions around wanting to care for children, failing to care for children and the needs of children for care have kept adoption alive.)

It is perhaps too soon to make any conclusions about the efficacy of international adoption. Some of the early research however suggests that international adoption is better for children than institutional care across many domains (Juffer and Ijzendoorn 2009, Welsh and Viana 2012).

The adoption literature for professionals before the 1960s tended to assume that the adopted child would never meet the birth parents. However, fiction and the self help literature regularly referred to the experiences of the adopted child, adoptive parents and birth parents meeting. I will argue later that many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century novels of Dickens included searching and reunion in the adoption triangle.

Before the 1960s, adoptees with articulated desires to find out about the birth parents were often discussed in terms of their psychopathology or poor quality adoption placements. The system operated on the basis that adoption was irreversible and that this allowed the ‘tabula rasa’ child to be offered a completely new start without any risk of the past interfering. It often assumed this was in the best interests of the child and the adoptive parents. If any references were made to the birth parents who relinquished legal powers over their children, it was usually in the context only of their negative influence on the child’s life. The system explicitly held the view that the adopted child had been ‘rescued’ and by receiving permanence in a family, would recover from the less than optimal original care. This was the logic that lay behind ‘closed adoption’ and the ‘sealed records’ in USA and the legally supported secrecy of the adoption process at certain points in various societies (Baran and Pannor 1990).

Clearly the definition of ‘less than optimal’ care has changed with societal changes. Until relatively recently, illegitimacy *in itself* was considered grounds for removing an infant from its unmarried mother (Kelly 2009). There are harrowing biographical accounts of single mothers being forced to relinquish their babies and grieving the loss for the rest of their lives (Sixsmith 2009).

So much has changed since the 1960s. The legal context has changed enormously with, firstly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1989). Amongst many other things this convention urged states to address the child's 'right to live with and have contact with both parents'. Secondly, the Children Act (1989), placed a responsibility on the local authority to work in partnership with birth parents. Thirdly, the Human Rights Act (1998) which recognized the right to start a family. Fourthly, the Adoption and Children Act (2002) put the needs of the child at the centre of the process, made sure that birth parents understood the adoption process, resolved disputes early, heard the voice of the child and required effective case management to avoid delay. All of the above clearly have had an enormous impact on adoption practice.

There has been a clear change in social mores regarding single parenthood and illegitimacy and better access to contraceptives. This probably accounts for the dramatic fall in the number of adoptions of healthy infants in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> It seems obvious to say that searching for birth parents is more likely to occur when the adoptee is placed after infancy.

There have been radical policy changes in the field of adoption recently. From the late 1990s the New Labour Government had a clear policy of using adoption to increase the number of looked after children in permanent families. It may be that this was driven by the high costs of children in care. However permanency for all children is also a much better psychological option than local authority care (Rushton 2003b, Triseliotis and Hill 1990). Controversially, the policy set standards for Local Authorities to increase the numbers of adoptions by a substantial rate. This has concerned some commentators about setting targets for adoption teams (Hilpern, 2008). The policy principle was stated clearly...

"It will underpin our drive to speed up the adoption process and deliver our target for a 40% increase, and if possible a 50% increase, in the number of looked after children who are adopted." (Department of Health Press Release 2002, Health Minister, Smith, J.)

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<sup>16</sup> The ONS released statistics recently for 2010 that showed that in England and Wales 4,472 adoption orders were made. This is significantly lower than the peak of 27,000 in 1969.

This may have been the right policy decision but it has had many clinical consequences which were perhaps not clearly anticipated. It led directly to many children being adopted at a later age but quicker (Bilton 2001, Rushton 2001, Sagar and Hitchings 2007). The pattern of adoption now is more likely to include older children with more experience of adversity (Brodzinsky et al 1998, Cohen, N.J. 2003, Hill and Shaw eds. 1998, Howe 1998, Triseliotis et al 1997). The evidence for the increased psychological damage of such children is regularly presented (Collishaw et al 2004, McCaan et al 1996, Department of Health / Performance and Innovation Unit Report 2000, Rushton et al 1993, 1995, Taichert and Harvin 1975, Tizard and Hodges 1990). In short, adopted children's relationships with birth parents may not have been of good quality but these children were often old enough to have clear established attachments that now needed to be woven into their new families in some way. This is clearly reflected in adoption practice now that most adoptions have some form of post adoption contact (Neil 2009).

At the time of writing the current coalition government has asked a senior figure, Martin Narey, to lead a review into adoption practice. The preliminary reports suggest that there will be another radical re-organisation of the adoption process. However the key elements remain. Adoption numbers should increase and the process should be much quicker (Williams, R. 2011).

### Research

From the 1970s onwards research evidence focusing on the deep rooted desire to search for birth parents was growing in the field of adoption. Triseliotis' 1973 work was the first of many that challenged the concept of the 'fresh start/rescue' closed model of adoption. However many other findings confirmed his position (Andersen 1988, 1989, Feast 2010, Feast et al 1994, Feast and Howe 1997, Feast and Philpot 2003, Haines and Timms 1985, Howe and Feast 2000, Lifton 1979, 1990, 1994, 2007, 2010, Ryburn 1995, Sachdev 1992, Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle 2005)

Broadly, the research suggested that in the long term, some adoptees reacted negatively to the complete end of all forms of contact with the birth family. However even in the early research it was clear that this was not true for all adoptees. The research also

appeared to suggest that there were benefits to maintaining links with birth families. The child was able to properly understand why the birth parents were unable to care for them. Again this was not true for all adoptees.

With this sea change in adoption practice, (more late placed children with experience of early adversity) it will come as no surprise that the numbers of adoptees searching has increased. Feast and Philpot's 2003 study found that 85% of the searchers had a 'long standing curiosity about their origins'. The research into the searching processes in adoption found that more adopted females than males initiated a search for birth relatives (Schechter and Bertocci 1990, Bertocci and Schechter 1991, Feast and Howe 1997, Howe and Feast 2000). Predictably the research also found that there was a higher percentage of children searching who were adopted at a later age. (Howe and Feast 2000)

The early pioneer in this research, Triseliotis, found that there was a correlation between actually initiating a search and some emotional difficulties. Curtis and Pearson (2010) also suggested this. Other research contradicted this finding. For example Haimes and Timms 1985 felt that self-identity was the driver to searching and was not directly related to emotional problems. Another strand of the research into the impact of searching found that there were often common triggers for the search. Feast and Howe 1997 proposed a 'life-cycle' way of thinking about this. The death of one's adoptive parents, marriage or having children were often the places where people could contemplate searching for birth parents.

### The inner world dimensions to the search

The searching dynamic is a complex and powerful force and I believe there is good evidence to believe that it is present in all parts of the adoption triangle (see chapter 8). *Birth* mothers speak movingly of their search in a multi-dimensional way. Often it becomes a life long quest. *Adoptive* parents also speak about their search. Often this is couched in slightly different terms. It manifests itself as a journey from infertility (but not always) to adoption of their particular 'found' child. (In the current state of adoption, inter country adoption can make the search a geographical one as well as a

psychological one.) Often the adoptive parents are preoccupied by the potential for their child to start to search for the birth parents. However in order to be clear about the inner world dynamic of searching, I have chosen to focus mostly on the *adoptee's* searching in this section.

### 1) Searching as an act of repair.

Feast and Philpot (2003) found that 60% of the adoptee searchers they studied 'felt that the result of the search would make them feel happier'. As noted throughout this work, the leitmotiv of the adoption process is loss. The *birth* parent has physically and psychologically carried another human being and then lost it. For the *adoptive* parent, the reality of the adopted child can confirm the loss of the fantasy of the biological child never conceived. (Or the perfect idealised adopted child that they were not matched with.) The *adoptee* grows up with an essential loss of growing up with birth parents. The adoptee's attempt to repair the inner world may manifest itself in searching.

The psychoanalytic literature on loss involving death is rich and informative (Black 1976, Freud 1917, Kubler-Ross 1969, Murray Parkes 1996). However, the impact of loss on the adoptee is more complex (Doka 1989, 2002) as the birth parents are often lost but not necessarily dead. The loss is *potentially* repairable. The adoptee's yearning to search is therefore different from the searching behaviour of the bereaved in that at a conscious and cognitive level the latter is aware of the irreversible nature of death. The searching adoptee struggles with the potentiality of meeting the birth parents and/or biological relatives.

Another similar component is the loss of the biological link with the adoptive parent. Jill Hodges has written (1984) about how the adoptee may feel that the absence of a blood relationship with the adoptive parents can become a potent source of loss.

As noted in chapter one, most adoption appears to be 'successful' especially if one allows the weight of subjective reports of success of the adoptee and the adoptive families (Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer, 2006, Wrobel and Neil 2009, Zamostny et al 2003). In the small percentage of cases that are not emotionally successful it would not

be hard to imagine the manner in which the adopted child feels doubly abandoned. For example, one can imagine the adopted child who then experiences an adoption breakdown would be vulnerable to powerful feelings about essentially not being lovable. (Rushton 2003a 2003b)

In 1909 Freud was able to describe the phenomenon of the fantasy of adoption that appears in all children. “Family Romances” (see chapter three) described latency aged children having ideas about being a stepchild or adoptee. As the developmental challenge of gradual separation from the parents becomes more of a central task, the child begins to imagine that his parents are not his real parents but substitutes. Wieder (1977b) took this idea further and suggested that adoptees created the opposite fantasy i.e. that they were the product of sexual intercourse between the adoptive parents. Two leading clinicians working therapeutically (Schechter and Bertocci 1990, Bertocci and Schechter 1991) with adoptees and their families led them to conclude that it was not quite so clear cut. They argued that the adoptee is more likely to oscillate between idealisation and denigration of both the birth parents and the adoptive parents.

Recent work by Howe (2007) seemed to confirm the often heard clinical narrative of unresolved loss in the mind of the adoptive parent having a corrosive impact on the adopted child. In the complex psychological interplay of adopted child and adoptive parent, undigested loss in both parties is potentially problematic. For example when the adopted child feels that the adoptive parents are searching for the baby that they miscarried and did not fully mourn, the stage is set for emotional problems (disconnection, false self, lack of containment).

The importance of loss in the complex equation of searching in adoption is clear in the many research findings that the trigger to search often comes about when the adoptive parents are dead.

## 2) Envy and jealousy

The concept of envy has varied meanings in different contexts. In the Kleinian model, envy would be described as the powerful primitive state in which the infant can feel

destructive towards the other for having resources that it does not. It is said to appear in a two person relationship. This is distinct from jealousy which is more about the relationships the other has with yet another (a three person relationship). Borrowing from Shakespeare we might say that Iago is envious of Othello whilst Othello is jealous of Desdemona's relationships.

The roles of envy and jealousy in the adoptive situation that contribute to searching behaviours are also primitive and powerful. Quite quickly the adopted child will come to perceive her differences from other children. Inevitable comparisons of experiences by very young children will flush out the facts that the adoptee is not living with biological parents. Although this may be less stigmatizing in the 21st century than it was in earlier epochs of alleged homogenized family structures, the adoptee soon realizes that the 'special' nature of their relationships to adoptive parents in some important psychological way sets them apart from others.<sup>17</sup>

Given the desire to have what non-adoptees have (blood ties, physical similarities, inter-generational bonds etc), it is not hard to imagine the adoptee being envious. The strong desire to enviously possess what the non-adoptee takes for granted can be a powerful trigger to search for birth parents. Similarly, jealous states of mind can be triggered when the adoptee perceives the advantages that the non-adoptee may have in the world. The adoptee may feel strongly about the non-adoptee having clear and obvious bonds with family, extended family and the generations preceding them. This must be a ripe ground for the ideas of searching for birth parents. The resentment often quoted by the adoptee towards the non-adopted world (Schechter and Bertocci 1990, Bertocci and Schechter 1991) for having been denied the experience of obvious sameness to a family group will be a large factor in searching for the adoptee.

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<sup>17</sup> Bertocci considered shame also to be an inner world component of activating a search for the birth parents. However she also now wonders if the most recent generations of adoptees are much less driven by shame. It may be that society has developed a much more accepting view of the adoptee (Personal communication 2008). Perhaps radical organisations like Bastard Nation in the USA have impacted the public perception of adoption positively.



The state of envy in the adoptee has its corollary in the *adoptive* parent. If the adoptive parents are dealing with the ongoing pain of infertility, the envious states of mind about fertile parents can be a primitive presence in the adoption process. This envious longing for the capacity to procreate that others own is a huge psychological challenge. It is undoubtedly present when adoption searching enters the process.

It is well documented that the adoption selection process by Social Workers is a rigorous one and necessarily so (Hocking 2012). Many applicants hoping to be adoptive parents feel that they are in competition for scarce babies and this can also trigger feelings of (over) possessiveness when the adoption is complete. Some have argued (Bertocci and Schechter 1991) that this leads to jealous guarding of the adopted child and sometimes a sense of betrayal when the adoptee initiates a search for the birth parents.

In the *birth parent(s)* states of envy and jealousy could be expected. Having given up a child and living with its absence, the relinquishing parent may be envious of the capacities of the adoptive couple who can care for the child. Jealousy of the relationships between the adoptive family members may also be present.

### 3) Sexual identity

“You have your mother’s eyes” is probably a statement made at so many family gatherings that its omnipresence can mask its significance to the adopted child. Without contact with the birth parent, the adoptee will scan their own body for clues about their genesis. This will go far beyond a vague interest in physical similarities with others and can become an intense need to trace one’s identity (Winter and Cohen 2005). In this light it is no surprise that the peak in difficulties between adoptees and their adoptive families often coincides with adolescence and its turbulent examination of identity. Feast and Philpot (2003) found that 77% of the adoptee searchers in their study did so for a more complete sense of identity.

Although not all adoptive parents suffer from infertility, it is a common theme in the adoption triangle. As female adoptees reach puberty and fertility, the tension with the

adoptive mother comes to the fore. The assumption (fantasy and phantasy) that the adoptive mother is not capable of producing children and the reality of the female adoptee's fecundity can produce a complex picture. The envy in the adoptive mother of the female adoptee and the guilt of the female adoptee can become rivalrous. It is often a factor in the sexual development and the searching of the adoptee.

As the adoptee develops sexually they will be faced with a factor that will surely have an impact on the manner in which they develop. To not know to whom you are related makes all sexual contact fraught with dangers and will often trigger searching for facts.

It could also be postulated therefore that the female adoptee entering puberty must struggle with her fantasy of her adoptive mother being barren and damaged internally. Her journey therefore to a creative sexual life is possibly more complex than other adolescent females who can identify directly with the sexuality of their biological mother. Hodges (1984) suggested that bearing children for the adoptee can be their physical link with the birth parents.

"Someone with whom there can be resemblances and in identification with whom, perhaps, one may find a biological parent who is there to resemble" (Hodges 1984:52)

When this meets up with the fantasies of the birth mother being sexually promiscuous, it again adds a further complication to the sexual development of the adoptee and may provide the momentum to search.

With its many unconscious features, sexuality for the adopted female is also often complicated by a sense of unreality. The fantasy of never having been properly 'born' impacts the prospect of entering sexual relationships and giving birth. When one's same sex adoptive mother has no biological experience of giving birth to you, pregnancy and childbirth can be a terrifying prospect. Searching for the birth mother in these circumstances makes much inner world sense.

Hodges (1984) also described how the adoptee can have fantasies about the reasons why they were given up for adoption which may impact on sexual development. Often

adoptees wonder if they had been the opposite sex then they would not have been relinquished. Confused sexual identity can also trigger searching in this context.

The sexual development of the male adoptee is less well researched (Schechter and Bertocci 1990, Bertocci and Schechter 1991). It may be that the journey to sexual identity for male adoptees is less entangled with reproduction and the body.

#### 4) Adoptee searching as control

Feast and Philpot (2003) found that the adoptees who search had high levels of ‘a sense of belonging’ and ‘feeling loved’ by their adoptive parents. However they also had strong feelings of feeling ‘different’. This tension probably contributes to the driver to search.

Lifton has written often about adoption searching and in particular the manner in which it is to control aspects of the self.

“I see the search as a quest for the missing parts of one’s narrative, for origins, for meaning, and for a coherent sense of self. We can understand it as a rite of passage, a way of being born again, a chance to take control of one’s destiny, of seizing power, of finding oneself”. (Lifton 2002:211)

Schechter and Bertocci (1990) introduce the work of Festinger (1957) to illustrate a particular element in the inner world of the adoptee’s decision to search (or not). When the elements of what one knows about one’s life all fit together, there is consonance. However the adoptee is often faced with elements that do not fit properly. For example, the society around the adoptee may expect them to be grateful for the chance to gain from the adoptive family whereas the adoptee may feel, less a sense of gratitude, and more a sense of loss and emptiness. This dissonance can trigger action and it often it takes the form of searching. Bertocci and Schechter summarise.

“The search, therefore, whether early (intrapsychic) or late (activated) in life, is an attempt to reconcile cognitive dissonances, to bring order out of chaos, and to gain

active control over forces to which the adoptee has had to respond passively in the past” (Schechter and Bertocci 1990:81)

### 5) Body Image

There is some evidence (Raynor 1980) to suggest that the satisfaction felt by adoptive parents and adoptees is, in part, related to how similar the parties feel they look. Hodges (1984) made the point that one of the missing factors for the adoptee is the ongoing and reciprocal perception of body similarities. In biological families the parents often stare in wonderment at the replication of aspects of themselves. Whilst at various developmental stages, the biological child will compare and contrast parts of his or her body with the parents to envision the future.

Schechter and Bertocci (1990) are clear that this is not a trivial point in the adoption process. The impoverishment of not having clear body similarities is a strong factor in the searching of an adoptee.

“In our clinical work we find it common place to hear adoptees making references, often associated with body-images issues, to spaces within themselves ... as well as spaces outside themselves ... as representing a painful sense of inadequacy, deficiency and detachment from humanity. The activated search becomes a last resort to alter these feelings and self-perceptions” (Schechter and Bertocci, 1990:83)

### 6) Attachment perspective

Most activated adoption searches occur after adolescence. Along with many other models, attachment theory has described the manner in which the development of relationships between infants and parents is based on a complex interplay of reciprocal communications. By the time of adolescence the challenge of individuation is centre stage. Many commentators suggest that the adolescent adoptee has more psychological work to do to separate effectively (Brinich 1990b, 1995).

From an attachment perspective the task for the adolescent is to manage to separate from the adoptive parents without losing their support. Their position is further complicated because at the same time they need to separate from the shadowy figures of the biological parents about whom the adoptee may only have sketchy information. This no doubt is an important dimension in the decision about searching or not.

#### 7) Human connectedness.

Bertocci and Schechter opt for this term in preference to other author's similar descriptions. Verrier (1993) writes about the 'primal wound', Sants (1964) about 'genealogical bewilderment', Pannor et al (1974) about 'need for human continuity'.

In almost philosophical terms Bertocci and Schechter strive to capture that sense of disconnection when the link with the biological parents is broken. They feel that for the adoptee in this situation, important aspects of the past and the future are obscured. There is a deep need (which exists at a different level to object attachment) to be part of human connectedness. Quoting from their research they suggest that many adoptees record feelings of being like human without being really human. It is therefore proposed that this deep sense of alienation and not belonging is a key driver of the searching in adoption.

In conclusion, a central paper in the psychodynamics of adoption searching field (Schechter and Bertocci 1990) brings it all together when they write...

"The search therefore constitutes the adoptee's attempt to repair a sense of loss, relieve the sense of disadvantage, consolidate identity issues including body image and sexual identity, resolve cognitive dissonance, internalise the locus of control and satisfy the most fundamental need to experience human connectedness" (Schechter and Bertocci 1990: 89)

## **Chapter Five.**

### Adoption, Psychoanalysis and Literature

“We have art, so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth”. (Nietzsche quoted by Ondaatje 2007: preface)

#### Introduction.

The history of adoption is a fascinating one (Benoit, Nickman and Rosenfeld 2005, Cole and Donley 1990). I will argue later that the adoption process has been an appealing palette for many as they struggle to understand the very nature of human existence. This is true of scientists, researchers, artists and writers. There is also an argument that adoption practice has evolved to reflect the needs of society in a dialectical manner. At various stages of evolution, societies have had to invent and adapt their legal and social parameters for children living in adoptive families. (Cole and Donley 1990, Triseliotis et al 1997) For example, Boswell (1988) wrote an erudite book on the complex history of abandonment and various forms of substitute care in western antiquity. During this period adoption was overtly often a way of determining succession rights.

Interestingly, Boswell was very clear that his sources for his research should include the overtly historical document but *also* the creative writings of the time. (This is very similar to the methodology adopted for this research.) He writes of his triangulated sources in this way:

“For the Roman empire and for Europe in the High Middle Ages, it is possible to compare as separate data bases a large corpus of historical writings – laws, ethical treatments, narrative accounts, demographic remains – with an extensive imaginative literature. The juxtaposition discloses a surprising consistency, indicating that, allowing for the obvious needs of plot and genre, creative writings afford extremely valuable clues about many details of abandonment, and usually correspond closely to the facts recoverable from more traditional historical sources. Very rarely do their depictions turn

out to be ‘quicksand stories’; often they are more like eyewitness accounts” (Boswell 1988:429)

Boswell is not the only one to plunder literature to explore human relationships. Bedford and Meekums (2010) have argued from a post-modern and attachment theory perspective that ...

“... literature can act as research data in order to enhance understanding of the psychosocial complexity within which individuals negotiate issues of attachment”. (Bedford and Meekums 2010:431)

### Adoption in literature.

It was noted in an earlier chapter, that there has been a preoccupation with all forms of substitute care in English literature (Howe 2009, Mullan 2011, Novy 2004, 2007). The writer often sees the removal of a child from biological parents and placement with adoptive parents as a rich creative narrative device with which to explore the human condition. Themes of loss, nature versus nurture, the essence of identity and the impact of parenthood are all recurring themes in literature. The recent phenomenal success of the Harry Potter (Rowling J.K. 1997-2007) stories indicates the great human interest in the writer’s exploration of these psychological themes in narrative form (Rustin and Rustin 2001).

Brinich (1990a) also notes the recurring theme of adoption in literature and myth. He brings our attention to the adoptee Luke Skywalker and his birth parent Darth Vader in the hugely popular Star War films. He argues that the popularity has something to do with the very human developmental challenge of dealing with our own ambivalence. To mature is to gradually become aware that the idealised version we may have had of our parents is not reality. In adoption stories in literature, the world can follow this struggle in detail as an adoptee balances love and hate and nature and nurture.

He writes of this popularity of adoption for adopted *and* non-adopted:

“Our psychoanalytic answer to the question about the popularity of adoption themes in myth, literature, and fairy stories is this: fantasies of adoption allow us to reclaim early images of our parents when we wish to discard the parents we now see. Fantasies of adoption allow us to express love and hate, at the same time, and to direct these feelings towards different aspects of our parents, these aspects being represented by the two sets of parents included within the ‘family romance’” (Brinich 1990a:44) (See also chapter three.)

Psycho-social issues are also clearly intertwined in the genesis of the novel. One could argue that from time to time, a novel arrives which is able to capture and explore a social or psychological challenge in a detailed and unique manner. The novel by Ian McEwan entitled “Saturday” (2005) for example was praised for dissecting the middle class liberal’s struggles with and attitude to the second Gulf War. Similar comments could be made about the novel by Martin Amis entitled “Money” (1984) and its exploration of the 1980s zeitgeist under a radical Conservative government’s promotion of a particular kind of capitalism.

This is not a new development. This capacity of the writer to illuminate something about the inner world and its relationship to society is evident in Shakespeare. Many of Shakespeare’s plays contained children reared by non-biological parents (e.g. The Comedy of Errors, Cymbeline, and Pericles). Shakespeare notoriously borrowed story lines from previous writers and wove them into scenes which explored the essence of human experiences. For example, Perdita (derived from the Latin word for ‘lost’) in Shakespeare’s Winter’s Tale (1610) is an abandoned child who grows up living in an adoptive family with no knowledge of her roots. Her nobleman father, in a state of morbid jealousy, rejects and abandons the infant Perdita. As he relinquishes his daughter and asks a servant to kill her by leaving her to die alone, this birth father says:

“We enjoin thee...that thou carry  
This female bastard hence, and that thou bear it  
To some remote and desert place, quite out  
Of our dominions; and that thou leave it,  
Without more mercy, to its own protection  
And favour of the climate. As by strange fortune



It came to us, I do in justice charge thee,  
On thy soul's peril, and thy body's torture,  
That thou commend it strangely to some place,  
Where chance may nurse or end it. Take it up." (Shakespeare 1610:2,3)

With typical Shakespearian symmetry, she grows up and falls in love with a young nobleman from her original class. When Perdita and her suitor flee from the boy's disapproving father, they eventually find her birth parents and she is happily reunited with her grieving mother. In this complex play Shakespeare manages to communicate important aspects of Perdita's search for her identity and the loss felt by the relinquishing parents especially the mother who is symbolised as an immobile statue without her daughter. Perhaps this is one of the best descriptions of the birth mother's loss and grief. She becomes frozen, lifeless and static. These are not dissimilar to contemporary birth mother stories (Aloi 2009, De Simone 1996, Kelly 2009, Wiley and Baden 2005,).

The writer's talent for illuminating psycho-social issues has been prevalent across many centuries. For example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when infant death rates were between a quarter and one-third and illegitimate children were at even higher risk (partly as a result of infanticide), the novels of the time wrestled with this problem. Kinship care has always existed and some forms of adoption have always been with us (Cole and Donely 1990, Boswell 1988, Kirk 1981) but sometimes were brutal and often mercenary. Even the limited number of novelists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the anguish of the relinquishing parent and the danger to the infant of sub-standard care. They created a narrative to explore the emotionality of it. For example Daniel Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* (1722) is set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It described the painful situation of this character as a very young woman giving birth and making a decision about having her baby adopted. Defoe describes the midwife...

"This grave matron had several sorts of practice, and this was one particular, that if a child was born, though not in her house (for she had the occasion to be called to many private labours) she had people at hand, who for a piece of money would take the child off their hands, and off from the hands of the parish too: and those children, as she said, were honestly provided for and taken care of. What should become of them all,

considering so many, as by her account she was concerned with, I cannot conceive ... But she was full of this argument, that she saved the life of many an innocent lamb, as she called them, which would otherwise perhaps be murdered: and of many woman, who made desperate by the misfortune, would otherwise be tempted to destroy their children, and bring themselves to the gallows. I granted her that this was true, and a very commendable thing, provided the poor children fell into good hands afterwards, and were not abused, starved and neglected by the nurses that bred them up. She answered, that she always took care of that, and had no nurses in her business but what were very good, honest people, and such as might be depended upon". (Defoe 1722:34, 286)

In this quote we can see that Defoe has captured a common aspect of the inner world of the adopter. The sense that the adoption will 'rescue' the baby. The quote also shows that even in Defoe's period, writers were illuminating the concerns about the standard of substitute care. Defoe captures the preoccupation of the relinquishing birth mother in the adoption triangle.<sup>18</sup> She is tormented by the consequences of adoption; will my baby be well cared for if I give her up etc?

Similarly, the novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also often have a fascination with displaced children and genealogy (Novy 2007). When the industrial revolution triggered sharp rises in illegitimacy, many authors were preoccupied by the consequences of these fundamental changes in society. It is certainly well documented by historians that the English Poor Law of 1824 was linked with the rise in and fear of illegitimacy. The 19<sup>th</sup> century novels were often also probing the micro politics of relationships between classes, families and individuals. Attacks on the nature and impact of stigma began to develop into a major theme of novels from this period. For example the novel *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Dickens rails against the stigma of illegitimacy. In this way the 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist was exploring the consequences of the changes in society from many

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly some have argued that one factor in the development of regulated and quality substitute care came from the public impact of novels such as *Moll Flanders* (Williams, A.N. 2004). Defoe actively advocated better care for these infants but it was not until Thomas Coram managed to establish the Foundling Hospital in 1739 that we had the first clear example of routinised and quality substitute care (Adie 2005).

different levels and providing a rich commentary on the psychology of individuals at that time.

Although adoption did not legally exist in the UK until 1926, de facto adoption existed and was referred to as 'adoption'. The characters of Oliver Twist, Pip of Great Expectations and Jane Eyre are all found in the literature of the time and all struggle with aspects of abandonment, loss, searching and identity in various ways.

### Psychoanalysis and Literature.

Psychoanalysis and Literature have always overlapped. Freud and Jung are both said to have been influenced by the reading of Goethe and Shakespeare (Bair 2004, Gay 1986, Jones 1953, Storr 1989). Freud was always clear that he was indebted to many other disciplines before he gave form to psychoanalysis. Literature was a clear influence and writers were often credited by Freud as having investigated very similar ground. Indeed there are twenty two references to art and literature in the English *Standard Edition*. The most commonly studied are the papers on 'Leonardo da Vinci' (1910), 'The Moses of Michelangelo' (1914) and 'Dostoevsky and Parricide' (1928). It is certainly true that after Freud gave up his plan to be a leader in neurology and instead formulated psychoanalysis, he was more likely to quote novelists and playwrights than other psychiatrists. Freud makes his position abundantly clear in 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*' (1907) when he wrote

"creative writers are valued allies and their evidence is to be highly prized, for they are apt to know whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream" (Freud, S. 1907, S.E. 9:8)

Perhaps this is because the structure of the novel and drama allows for the fuller articulation of the inner world. With its facility for the narrator to describe feelings and emotions in depth and in a way that other art forms could not easily tolerate, the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel is an important source of information about the essential nature of the adoption experience.

Indeed a whole specialist field of psychoanalytic literary criticism evolved and contributed to an understanding both of the art of literature and psychoanalysis. For example Norman Holland (1968, 1975 and 1992) developed a body of work that relied heavily on psychoanalysis. Holland proposed a way of seeing literature as the product of human fantasies which interact with ego-defences. He developed a number of charts to table the different types of literary affect, the fantasies and the defences that create them.

It is certainly true that the link between psychoanalysis and literature is a vibrant one. Jackson (2000) is critical of psychoanalysis on many levels but asserts that...

“This is one of the most powerful explanatory theories of the twentieth century; I claim it is true, and has not been superseded by cognitive science. On the contrary, it fits easily alongside plausible cognitive models – mathematical models of language, computer models of brain functioning, studies of animal, genetic and ecological explanations of animal and human sexuality. It does not contradict, but provides an essential basis for, cultural and historical accounts of the development of complex ideas about sexuality and power. It also helps to explain how art and literature are produced, and why they can be compulsive addictions. It offers the only interpretations of literature and art that are based on biology and therefore universal, though always incomplete” (Jackson 2000:3)

Jackson argues that there are at least five ways in which psychoanalysis can contribute to a better understanding of literature. He argues that psychoanalysis has a theory of literary creation similar to dream and symptom formation. That is, that fantasy interacts with experience (condensation, displacement etc.) to produce the art in literature. Secondly, psychoanalysis offers literary interpretations that can uncover the unconscious aspects of the literature (in the same way that it can work on dream material to unlock the meaning of dreams). Thirdly, it provides a theory of writing and reader-response. This throws light on how literature functions and what it is for. Fourthly, it gives a theory of universal human nature with a clear account of the mind, the unconscious. Lastly it provides a theory of individual characters, types of neurosis, cases etc.

Writing with a deep knowledge of both psychoanalysis and literature, Margot Waddell (1986) captures the key overlap of both fields.

“Literature and the psychoanalytic process may be thought of as being to do with apprehending certain areas of experience and expressing them in such a way as to make our own apprehension of those realities in ourselves more tolerable” <sup>19</sup>(Waddell 1986:110)

The giant in this area is Charles Dickens. His views of childhood are of course influenced by his own biography. It is well documented that his experience of poverty (his father ran up debts and was briefly imprisoned) left Charles Dickens with emotional scars (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2011, Ackroyd 1990/2002, Tomalin 2011). In his childhood Dickens was sent to work in Warrens blacking factory in London. Ackroyd utilises one of the descriptions the adult Dickens gave of this frightening childhood experience,

“... a crazy, tumbledown old house, abutting of course on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscotted rooms and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again.” (Ackroyd 2002:45)

One of his early biographers (Forster 1874) described Dickens going to this factory just after his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. Dickens recalled this brief experience of menial labour for the rest of his life and referred to it as the ‘secret agony of my soul’. Forster quotes Dickens saying of his placement in employment at this age,

“It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age.”...  
“The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless”  
(Quoted in Tomalin 2011:29)

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<sup>19</sup> In chapter seven, we will see that Ondaatje makes a similar point when he (twice) quotes Nietzsche saying “We have art, so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth”.

When, by a stroke of good luck, he was finally returned to his family it was his father who wanted him to leave work and return to education. It was his mother who preferred him to get back to work in the factory. Forster quotes Dickens,

“I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back” (Quoted in Tomalin 2011:29)

This early experience of maternal rejection, physical toil and squalor is thought to have inspired many of his political views but it also enhanced his ability to capture many aspects of childhood (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2011, Ackroyd 1990/2002 Tomalin 2011). The sudden end of his childhood seemed to result in the encapsulation of his perception of childhood. Perhaps he was developmentally stuck as a result of these experiences. Reflecting as an adult, Dickens wrote:

“My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (Ackroyd 2002:46)

It could be argued that when part of his childhood was removed temporarily, Dickens was sensitised to the loss. As a result we can imagine him increasing his valuation of childhood and the essential psychological tasks contained in the developmental stages of childhood. As a result he developed his outstanding observational and descriptive skills which allowed him to paint a very accurate picture of both the external and internal worlds of children at this time.

Tomalin (1991) places this experience at the centre of Dickens evolution as an artist.

“Dickens’s childhood misery was like a secret totem, a secret source of power from which he drew, and Forster was one of the very few who knew of it, and who could therefore understand the strength of what was being said now. Those early sufferings were caused by his parents’ – and particularly his mother’s – failure to cherish him and see his true worth during a time of trial; they were the spur to the enormous act of will that made him great.” (Tomalin 1991:147)

Dickens' novels are full of orphaned children who are treated badly by society. He is clearly concerned about the impact of the social exclusion. Whilst writing of Jo the street sweeper in *Bleak House* he makes a point about all orphaned children...

“Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark – but not their bite” (Dickens, 1853:259)

Their narratives are descriptions of tremendous struggles against stigma and oppression. The manner in which the orphans / adoptees struggle with societal constraints often merge into powerful narratives of the psychological journeys of his characters. His mature works are clearly 'political' but the description of the inner worlds of his characters is pertinent to attempts to better understand the adoption process. By writing with such clear descriptions of adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents, Dickens describes the inner world of the adoption triangle.

In conclusion then it seems that there is a *prima facie* case for arguing that writers of fiction have an important contribution to the understanding of the inner world. The adoption processes have been of interest to this group of artists since written stories were recorded. Their contribution to the fuller understanding of the central themes of adoption across the adoption triangle can now be examined in more detail in the next chapters.

## **Chapter six**

### Adoption themes in Bleak House.

“O, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don’t go away. O, speak to me!” (Dickens, 1853:30)

### Introduction.

The late work of Dickens is best illustrated by the opus Bleak House (1853). Many believe this stands as an example of the mature Dickens writing at his best (Chesterton 1906, Dyson 1969, Hawes 2007, Lucas 1992, Tomalin 2011). Biographers of Dickens suggest that the relative lack of references to the process of writing of Bleak House in his letters of the time, suggest that he felt much more in command of the material and had an unusual certainty about it (Hartley 2012).

Ackroyd (1990/2002) noted that the reviews of Bleak House at the time were not entirely positive. Some felt that it was unfunny and ponderous compared with his earlier novels. David Lodge put it this way recently...

“A division of opinion began to emerge as Dickens matured as a novelist, when his view of Victorian society became more critical and his comedy darker in books like Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Hard Times. We see these novels today - certainly the first two - as among his best, but ordinary readers missed the comic exuberance and reassuring happy endings of the earlier novels, while the literati were increasingly out of sympathy with his artistic method - especially what a writer in the Contemporary Review called ‘grotesque impossibilities’ of his plotting and characterisation.” (Lodge 2011:43)



Acknowledging that *Bleak House* was darker, Ackroyd suggests that it was also a watershed in his development as a novelist.

“... as Dickens wrote each novel he came to a much more intimate understanding of his own vision of the world, and this closer acquaintance with his own genius inevitably precluded a certain kind of improvisation or elaboration which in a lesser novelist can be seen as ‘charming’ or ‘ingenious’. Forster had noticed it, too, this loss of ‘freedom’; but it was a necessary part of the restraining and refining force of Dickens’s imagination. He was seeing things more clearly, he was seeing them as a whole” (Ackroyd 2002:360)

In this complex book he is breaking new ground with a double narrative style<sup>20</sup> and possibly even introducing detective fiction as a genre. One of the double narrators in this large plot-driven book, with more than 50 characters, is Esther. She tells her story directly to the reader in the past tense and in an observant, direct but possibly naive manner. Her first comments in the book are full of self deprecation.

“I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that. I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll when we were alone together, ‘Now, Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!’ And so she used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips staring at me – or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing – while I busily stitched away and told her every one of my secrets” (Dickens, 1853:27)

Dickens as author takes turns to outline the story with Esther the narrator and in this way is able to change the pace and scope of the elaborate story as it develops. Interestingly some have argued that this technique of Dickens also allows him to pull

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<sup>20</sup> It is hard for the modern reader to understand just how radical this narrative style was to the reader in 1853. Lucas 1992 argues that the use of the double narrative allowed Dickens to compare and contrast the omniscient and unknown narrator with the female, inhibited and illegitimate Esther. This unsettled the reader but allowed Dickens to make connections and point out contradictions in society. I would add that it also allowed inner world explorations in a subtle manner. The ambivalence and contradiction of human life could be captured.

back from the full exposure of the issues of gender and sexuality (Novy 2007). However, I would suggest that it is exactly this ‘double narrative’ technique which allows Dickens to weave different textures and tackle difficult psychological issues from different perspectives. The two narrators and the reader form a triangle that allows cross referencing and a potentially deeper exploration of the material. Esther strikes the reader as essentially observant and sympathetic to the others she meets, but not particularly insightful consistently. In contrast to Esther, the second narrator has an omniscience that allows the contradictions of what they describe to illuminate the complex world of relationships and inner world conditions. Dickens manages to use this well and facilitate the reader’s own perception.

Dickens as a very modern author has, in this way, kept his readers (instalment by instalment<sup>21</sup>) with him whilst he uncovers their prejudices and the emotional pain of loss and abandonment in the stories of society that surround them. With his observational skills and powerful use of language he explores inner world issues with his readers without overly shocking them into closing down prematurely.

In many ways Dickens approach to episodic narratives allowed him to have a very different kind of dialogue with his readers than many before him. As Lodge (2011) commented he was often only a few chapters ahead of his own readers and he certainly changed parts of the novel if the feedback from earlier chapters suggested it. For example, the novel ‘Martin Chuzzlewit’ was changed by Dickens when the sales figures were lower than normal.

“He published all his novels initially in monthly or weekly parts before they were issued as complete books. He was often only one or two instalments ahead of his readers, and (like the producers of modern soaps) would modify the work in progress according to its reception...” (Lodge 2011:46)

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<sup>21</sup> Dickens became initially popular by providing quality writing in instalments in magazines. Starting with the ‘Monthly Magazine’ and later ‘Bentley’s Miscellany’, ‘Household Words’ and ‘All the Year Round’. Schlicke 2011, Lucas 1992 Tomalin 2011 argue that Dickens moved from occasional pieces in magazines to novels by instalments in magazines that later became stand alone novels in order to earn money but perhaps more importantly to have more control of the medium.

Dickens is famous for his use of language and his talent for naming his characters to capture something important about their psychology<sup>22</sup>. For example, who can forget the impact of the name Mr Bumble in communicating something about the bumptious beadle in *Oliver Twist*? His biographer Ackroyd (2002) thought that this naming process was key to the process that Dickens went through to enliven his characters. He writes:

“Names would always be very important to him. In later years he could not begin a book until he had hit upon the right title, and in a notebook he made lists of fanciful or odd surnames to assist with his inspiration. It is simply that, without the name, the essence could not and did not exist; he was a man who trusted in the power of words and the name seemed to call forth the character whom then he could begin to portray” (Ackroyd 2002:101)

It is interesting then that the double narrator in *Bleak House* is called Esther Summerson. We can see that the choice of ‘Summerson’ captures her overtly summery and bright personality. However, it can be no coincidence that Esther is also a biblical character. The biblical Esther is adopted by her cousin Mordecai and by influencing the King she is able to save the Jews from a sentence of death (Old Testament, Book of Esther). This ‘saving and rescuing’ nature of Esther appears in the novel in many levels. Novy (2007) also argues that Summerson may refer to the practice of giving illegitimate infants the name of ‘Summer’ as they were often conceived during the summer festivals.<sup>23</sup>

See appendix five for a brief plot synopsis of *Bleak House*.

See appendix six for a family tree of the main characters.

### Esther Summerson as an adoptee

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<sup>22</sup> Aptonym refers to the choice of name for a character that communicates something about their personality. Dickens is well known to have spent much energy on this part of his creative writing (Ackroyd 2002, Tomalin 2011).

<sup>23</sup> In another part of this work when I compare Dickens and Ondaatje, there is an overlap in terms of the choice of names for characters. .

Esther describes her feelings about her early care in terms that communicate distance and loneliness. Dickens manages to capture the child's view of a carer in these circumstances of substitute care. The sense of puzzlement and the need to project are clear. Describing her aunt / godmother Esther writes...

"She was always grave and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of the other people made her frown all her life. I felt so different from her, even making every allowance for the differences between a child and a woman; I felt so poor, so trifling, and so far off; that I never could be unrestrained with her- no, could never even love her as I wished." (Dickens, 1853:28)

This early description in the novel of Esther's emotional experiences with her substitute carer (aunt / godmother) has all the features of a poor kinship placement.

"I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was." (Dickens, 1853:29)

We can see that Esther was preoccupied with her birth mother. To have no information about a birth parent denies something quite essential to identity. It is clear that as the adoptee grows older and becomes more aware of the process of adoption, it is essential that age appropriate information is available (Brodzinsky et al 1998, 2011). Esther struggles to recall if she had ever been dressed in black. It might have been a clue about her mother being dead and attending the funeral. Poignantly, the child is desperately trying to make sense of the lack of information and scans her own memory for an image that might make sense of the gap in her story. In this way, Dickens captures the state of mind of a child being cared for by an adult who is not attuned to the emotional needs of the adopted child.

Raised by a religious zealot who did not allow her to mix socially with other children, Esther was an isolated child.

“Although there were seven girls at the neighbouring school where I was a day boarder, and although they called me little Esther Summerson, I knew none of them at home. All of them were older than I, to be sure (I was the youngest by a good deal), but there seemed to be some other separation between us besides that and besides their being far more clever than I was and knowing much more than I did. One of them in the first week of my going to the school (I remember it very well) invited me home to a little party, to my great joy. But my godmother wrote a stiff letter declining for me, and I never went, I never went out at all.” (Dickens, 1853:29)

We learn later about some of the godmother’s own difficulties and it does seem that she limited the child’s development because of her own agenda.

Esther struggled with her difference. At one point she manages to articulate what many adopted children wrestle with.

“O, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don’t go away. O, speak to me!” (Dickens, 1853:30)

Again we see how the adoptee Esther is desperate to understand the loss of her birth mother. It is a common phenomenon in the field of adoption that the adopted child will often blame themselves for personal flaws that led to their rejection (Hertz 1998). Dickens has captured in narrative form the anguish of trying to grapple with the loss of a mother without the inner world resources to fully understand. Faced with this loss many children assume that they are the guilty parties. Dickens lays bare this common dynamic early in the novel and prepares us for one of Esther’s defences against the loss of abandonment.

Esther’s birthday is a source of pain. The “most melancholy day at home, in the whole year” (Dickens, 1853:29). For many adoptees, birthdays are complicated events (Eldridge 2004). It has the mixture of celebration and yet painful acknowledgement that the adoptee’s birth was not wanted or tolerated. Early in the story, Esther recalls a

birthday. She is struck by a look on her aunt/godmother's face and asks a question. Devastatingly, Miss Barbary<sup>24</sup> replies,

"Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come – and soon enough – when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. I have forgiven her; but her face did not relent; the wrong she did me, and I say no more of it, though it was greater than you will ever know – than any one will ever know, but I, the sufferer. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. Forget your mother, and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now go! ...

Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparation for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart". (Dickens, 1853:30)

The substitute carer of Esther is focused on the birth mother and not the child in front of them. The treatment of Esther as a young child by her cruel aunt/godmother might be considered abusive. Faced with the projection into her by Miss Barbary, the child has to hold herself together in some psychological manner.

She develops a relationship with a doll and it serves as emotional support. 'Dolly' is used to receive the narratives of her life. The reliability of Dolly her 'solitary friend' allows her to survive. Esther tells us that she has long important conversations with Dolly.

"I ... confided to her that I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent), and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contended, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could". (Dickens, 1853:31)

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<sup>24</sup> Again we see Dickens' use of surnames to convey an aspect of character. Miss Barbary stands for the cruelty of mismatched substitute parents and children (barbaric).

Dickens gives us a startling image of the mismatch between the aunt / godmother and the young orphan Esther. Esther is reading the Bible to her on what soon turns out to be her deathbed ...

“It must have been two years afterwards, and I was almost fourteen, when one dreadful night my godmother and I sat at the fireside. I was reading aloud and she was listening. I had come down at nine o’clock, as I always did, to read the Bible to her, and was reading from St John, how our Saviour stooped down, writing with his finger in the dust, when they brought the sinful woman to him.

‘So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!’

I was stopped by my godmother’s rising, putting her hand to her head, and crying out, in an awful voice, from quite another part of the book:

‘Watch ye, therefore! Lest coming suddenly he finds you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!’”. (Dickens, 1853:32)

The tension between the Biblical quotes brings attention to the relationship between the essentially sympathetic Esther and the Aunt / Godmother’s moral hard-line. Esther’s biblical quote (John 8:7) is about the forgiving of the adulteress (note the link with her birth mother). The Aunt / Godmother’s (Mark 13:35) orientation around punishment and threatened retribution (note the link with her disproportionate anger towards her sister’s sexual activity).

When her aunt/godmother suddenly dies, John Jarndyce becomes Esther's guardian. He arranges for her to attend a boarding school where Esther blossoms in the company of others. After making a success of her years in a nurturing environment, she reaches the end of her education. There is a moving ceremony when Esther prepares to leave the school. She takes Dolly and wraps her in a shawl and buries her below her window. “I am half ashamed to tell it” says Esther of her ending ritual. In this way we can see that she is marking the end of one stage of her life and entering another. Without a containing object to facilitate emotional growth, Esther manages to hold herself together using her doll and ritual.

Dickens has observed that children will often use dolls to help them deal with psychological challenges. A hundred years later in 1953, Winnicott also described this phenomenon. Winnicott's idea of a transitional object fits well with Esther's use of her plaything to cope with life.

In the school that John Jarndyce has paid for, Esther is able to gain acceptance. However she appears to do this by taking the role of 'helper' to all that need her. At one level Dickens may have been applauding this Christian response to adversity. Often his female characters are only lovable when they are domestic and compliant. However, again his keen observation is also describing the adoptee's defence of being 'good'. Submissiveness and modesty can often be the adopted child's psychological way of dealing with rage at being abandoned and difficulty with the gratitude at being given nurture. By hoping to win love by 'good works', Esther runs the risk of living an inauthentic life based on denial of inner world states.

Throughout the novel Esther talks about feeling 'different' from all others. However, Dickens introduces other characters who see a resemblance between Esther and Lady Dedlock and comment on it. Jo the street child and Mr Guppy the solicitor's clerk both articulate the facial similarities between the two at significant points in the story. When Mr Guppy sees the portrait of Lady Dedlock in Chesney Wold he exclaims,

“'Blest!' says Mr Guppy, staring in a kind of dismay at his friend, 'if I can ever have seen her. Yet I know her! Has the picture been engraved, miss?'” ... 'It's unaccountable to me,' he says, still staring at the portrait, 'how well I know that picture! I'm dashed!' adds Mr Guppy, looking around, 'if I don't think I must have had a dream of that picture, you know!'” (Dickens, 1853:110)

It seems as if the similarity between adopted child (Esther) and birth mother (Lady Dedlock) is clear to many<sup>25</sup>. Esther's resistances to seeing this link are deep.

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<sup>25</sup> It is not only Guppy. When Lady Dedlock speaks behind Ada during the storm, Ada is initially convinced that it was Esther who spoke. Jo the street sweeper becomes agitated when he meets Esther thinking that she was the figure who asked to see the graveyard of Captain Hawdon (Lady Dedlock). And Mr George when he first meets Esther is sure that they have met before (he knew her birth father well).



Dickens, the author of novels by instalment (see chapter six), may be trying to engage the reader by leaving clues but it also stands as Esther's struggle with her own identity. Without firm facts about her genealogy she tries as best she can to form an identity. When evidence presents itself about her possible roots, she baulks at finding out more and unconsciously refuses to 'know'. This picture of knowing but not knowing from Dickens has similarities with the adoption process in which the adoptee only slowly edges towards building a reliable identity (Hoopes 1990).

This theme of knowing and yet not knowing runs throughout much of the Bleak House opus. For example, Krook the owner of the bottle shop makes the link between the birth mother, the aunt/godmother and the adoptive father of Esther when he first meets Esther Summerson, Richard Carstone and Ada Clare.

"Carstone, he repeated, slowly checking off that name upon his forefinger; and each of the others he went on to mention, upon a separate finger. 'Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare, and the name of Dedlock, too I think. 'He knows as much of the cause as the real salaried Chancellor'! said Richard, quite astonished, to Ada and me. (Dickens 1853:71)

This illiterate old man that they have just met lists the three names that would start to explain the puzzle of her origins and yet Esther does not know or perhaps cannot allow herself to know. Dickens may be describing an important area here. If Esther had asked a few questions she might have been able to solve the riddle of her identity. Barbary is the name of her aunt / godmother and Dedlock is her birth mother. Perhaps she cannot face the truth at this point in the development of her identity.

Chesney Wold, the Dedlock mansion, has a history that communicates something important for our understanding of Esther's discovery of her birth mother. During the English Civil War, the ancient home in Lincolnshire hosted a divided loyalty. The Master was a Royalist whilst his wife was a supporter of the Parliamentarians. In order to hamper his cavalry support, the wife secretly injured the husband's horses. In a rage the Master cripples her. Her deathbed curse on the household is that she will haunt Chesney Wold in the 'Ghost Walk' until the house is humbled. Dickens is surely again bringing the reader to consider the nature of identity and the impact of the past on the

present. It is no coincidence that the first real and truthful meeting of the adopted Esther and the birth mother (Lady Dedlock) takes place on the ‘Ghost Walk’. From his 19<sup>th</sup> century perspective Dickens is making an important point in his narrative about the past and its powerful presence in the present<sup>26</sup>.

When Dickens writes of the re-unification of Esther and her birth mother, he pulls out all the stops and veers into melodrama. In his writing describing the creation of Bleak House, Dickens refers to this scene as ‘the great turning idea’ (Ackroyd, 2002:354). The passage is however also a moving description of the unconscious becoming conscious. The half digested thoughts that there was something of a link between the life of Esther and Lady Dedlock suddenly become ‘known’. The power of the reunification meetings between adoptees and birth parents is often commented upon in the adoption literature (Kelly 2009, Sachdev 1992) and this quote from Bleak House is consistent with these more contemporary descriptions.

“I looked at her; but I could not see her, I could not hear her, I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild, that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassioned me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, ‘O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me!’ – when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us” (Dickens, 1853:579)

The last portion of the quote again puts us in touch with Esther’s defences. Her feelings about her face after being marked by the smallpox now becomes a blessing in that her birth mother need never be troubled by others seeing a similarity. This constant humility

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<sup>26</sup> In another part of this work I show that Michael Ondaatje makes the same point in his novel *Divisadero* from a 21<sup>st</sup> century point of view. Both contrasting authors are exploring adoption and both are saying that the past is omnipresent in the present.

and self deprecation grates with the modern reader<sup>27</sup>. However it also could be the accurate observation of an adoptee who needs to be ‘good’ so much that she denies her own authentic identity. As noted in chapter three, Dickens has illuminated the dynamic of splitting in his description of Esther. The natural destructive aspects of her personality have been split off presumably because Esther fears that having them will invite retaliation from stronger others.

Dickens had written so powerfully of the reunification meeting between Esther and Lady Dedlock that it might come as a shock that they kiss ‘for the last time’ and agree to keep the discovery a secret. Many adoptees search for information about their birth parents and a percentage of these searchers meet the parents. The percentage of those that do and have positive relationships has been well researched (Feast and Philpot 2003, Triseliotis et al 2005). There is a smaller subset of this group that meet with birth parents and have a painful second abandonment. To lose, find and be lost yet again is thought to be emotionally excruciating (Howe and Feast 2000). This is what occurs in *Bleak House*. The pain is palpable. This is especially so when Dickens describes other successful reunited families at other points in the story. For example Sergeant George Rouncewell journeys from estranged son to being reunited with his mother and brother.

After Esther meets her birth mother and then parts from her, Dickens captures the pain of the search. He describes the omnipresent constant scanning of the world for the mother. Again this is remarkably similar to the descriptions given of searching by contemporary adoption triad members (Robinson 2009).

“It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother’s voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I longed to do, and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. It matters little that I watched for every public mention of my mother’s name; that I passed and repassed the door of her house in town, loving it, but afraid to look at it; that I once sat in the theatre when my mother was there and saw, and when we were so wide asunder, before the great company of all degrees, that any link or confidence between us seemed a dream.” (Dickens, 1853:669)

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed Tomalin 2011 notes that Charlotte Bronte at the time of publishing said Esther was ‘weak and twaddling’

Towards the end of the story, Detective Bucket becomes aware that Lady Dedlock has fled her home. He knows that she is not the murderer of Tulkinghorn but Lady Dedlock does not know that she is no longer a suspect. Bucket recruits Esther to search for her. It is clear that he fears Lady Dedlock is at considerable risk of suicide. The scenes in which they travel out and then back to London are good examples of Dickens and metaphor. The searching for the birth parent becomes dream like. It becomes a psychological journey in which houses take on human shapes and water-gates open and close in her mind.

“I have the most confused impressions of that walk. I recollect that it was neither night nor day; that the sleet was still falling, the street-lamps were not yet put out and that all the ways were deep with it. I recollect a few chilled people passing in the streets. I recollect the wet housetops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went. ... the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real”. (Dickens, 1853:913)

Dickens has used his skill to show the reader the potency of the psychological experience of searching for a parent. In his powerful use of language he is able to capture the urgency and the disorientating impact of the need to find the parent. This is a true picture of searching in the adoption triangle.

She eventually finds her mother dressed in a poor woman's clothes at the grave of her birth father.

#### Richard Carstone as an adoptee.

In Bleak House, Richard is painted as a superficially charming young man but with character flaws. He has been well educated (at the famous Winchester school) before he became a ward and yet he struggles to manage his money and to settle in any direction with his life. Increasingly fascinated by the Jarndyce and Jarndyce lawsuit and increasingly disenchanted with his guardian / adoptive father, he flits from one task to

another. Could this be the observer in Dickens commenting on the adoptees' sense of incompleteness?

"I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how *can* I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn't settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook, unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that's my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since". (Dickens, 1853:371)

Clearly Dickens is overtly describing a young man caught in the web of a complex legal dispute but it is also a description of the search for identity in a young man in substitute care.

As Bleak House progresses we can see that Richard gradually identifies his adoptive father with the problems of the legal suit he is so preoccupied with. John Jarndyce becomes "an embodied antagonist and oppressor" (Dickens, 1853:631). Richard says that John Jarndyce is ...

"...the embodiment of the suit; that in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay, and every new disappointment, is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand". (Dickens, 1853:626)

The progression Dickens outlines is not unfamiliar in the adoption triangle. Often in adolescence the adopted young person will acknowledge the nurture available from the adoptive family whilst apparently also attacking it for its absence in earlier stages of development (O'Shaughnessy 1964)

In Bleak House Dickens has described the impact of the transference on Richard. As mentioned in chapter three, Dickens is pointing out that Richard is relating to his adoptive father Jarndyce as a particular kind of man that he is not in external reality. Richard relates to Jarndyce as if he were a thief and liar. Presumably this is from a

previous set of subjective relationships. As the tension between the two versions of Jarndyce competes, Dickens describes the cost to Richard's physical and mental health.

Dickens portrays Richard the adoptee as a young man locked in a struggle for mental health. In a depressed state, Richard describes his own life.

“But put yourself in my case, dragging on this dislocated life, sinking deeper and deeper into difficulty every day, continually hoping and continually disappointed, conscious of change upon change for the worse in myself, and of no change for the better in anything else; and you will find it a dark-looking case sometimes, as I do”. (Dickens, 1853:625)

Richard's deteriorating physical and mental health is never clearly labelled by Dickens. However given the descriptions of periods of activity and grand plans followed by bouts of inactivity we might borrow the psychiatric classification of bi-polar depression. Could it be that Dickens wanted us to understand the long term impact of loss and abandonment even if it is followed by good quality substitute care? Perhaps he would not be surprised by the contemporary statistics about adoptees being over represented in mental health clinics (Brinich 1990a, Brodzinsky 1993, 2011)

We can see by contrasting the description of the two adoptees, Richard and Esther, that Dickens had a good understanding of the inner world elements in the adoption process. Both Richard and Esther had lost birth parents and yet their responses to substitute care was very different. Esther's personality structure made her a 'good girl', always self deprecating and helping others. Richard on the other hand had a similar experience of loss but rejected the nurture that became available and at times turned it into the opposite of care. Esther's defence structure could be said to be functional given her position in society, whilst Richard appears to be self destructive<sup>28</sup>. This continuum exists in the real world of adoption and is well observed in this piece of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature.

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<sup>28</sup> This rejection of nurture and the presence of a self destructive tendency are also apparent in one of the characters in Michael Ondaatje's novel. There are similarities between Richard in Bleak House and Coop in Divisadero.

### Lady Dedlock as a birth parent.

The character of Lady Dedlock is presented by Dickens as an example of bored and arrogant aristocracy. However as the novel builds we see that Lady Dedlock has lost her identity by denying her relationships with ex-lover Captain Hawdon and her daughter Esther. Evidence of how Lady Dedlock has defended against emotional pain comes in this quote...

“She is not a hard lady naturally ... but so long accustomed to suppress emotion, and keep down reality; so long schooled for her own purposes, in that destructive school which shuts up the natural feelings of the heart”. (Dickens,1853:851)

The boredom is a carapace to cover her preoccupation with her own past. Her emotional struggles to stop being Hawdon’s lover and to be the wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock are doomed to fail. The story builds and carries her from being ‘bored to death’ towards her own past as she searches for her daughter to say goodbye and then to die in the same graveyard as her ex-lover. The undigested past comes back to her.

Lady Dedlock is written by the republican leaning Dickens as part of a fading aristocracy. However, he engages the reader with many clues about the direction of the story. In an early chapter he describes the sunlight unusually breaking into the room with portraits of the Dedlock ancestors. Dickens makes a point of saying a ‘broad bend – sinister’ crosses the painting of Lady Dedlock. This heraldic term refers to the custom of signifying illegitimacy by having a stripe run upper left to lower right on a coat of arms. In this way Dickens suggests to the reader that Lady Dedlock’s boredom is connected to other issues.

Dickens brings our attention to the inner world struggles of this relinquishing birth mother in chapter 12 of Bleak House. Lady Dedlock has returned ‘bored’ from London to the Lincolnshire home. The staff are presented and a new maid is introduced.

“‘Who is that girl?’

‘A young scholar of mine, my Lady. Rosa’

‘Come here, Rosa!’ Lady Dedlock beckons her, with even an appearance of interest.

‘Why, do you know how pretty you are, child?’ she says, touching her shoulder with her two fore fingers.

Rosa, very much abashed, says ‘No, if you please, my Lady!’ and glances up, and glances down, and don’t know where to look, but looks all the prettier.

‘How old are you?’

‘Nineteen, my Lady’

‘Nineteen,’ repeats my Lady, thoughtfully. ‘Take care they don’t spoil you with flattery’.” (Dickens, 1853:186)

Dickens is subtly bringing the reader to think about the young beautiful nineteen year old Lady Dedlock. Lady Dedlock was probably at this age when she was pregnant with her secret child. The loss and the energy involved in psychologically eradicating the fact are inherent in Dickens narrative here.

Dickens wrote accurately about the relationships between child and parent. He seemed to have an intuitive psychological grasp of the mother – child dyad. Although he is often criticised for being sentimental about mother-love, nevertheless he was able to capture something of the inner world connections. The double narrative again allows him to explore the first hand nature of the way feelings are stirred up when Esther and her birth mother meet for the first time. At this point they still do not know who each other are but at an unconscious level the encounter is of huge significance.

“Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languor, and to hold mine! It was only a moment before I cast mine down – released again, if I may say so – on my book; but, I knew the beautiful face quite well, in that short space of time.

And, very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother’s; yes away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass, after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady’s face before in all my life – I was quite sure of it – absolutely certain.” (Dickens, 1853:290)



We can see that Dickens understood the searching for connection that adoptees often describe. The fleeting sight of her birth mother triggers a free association to the loneliness of her early times with her godmother (actually her aunt and sister of her mother).

Bleak House is a complex web of characters and themes. One theme surfaces around the point of the novel when Lady Dedlock meets Esther. They meet accidentally whilst both are sheltering during a storm. There is some social connection between Lady Dedlock and John Jarndyce and so all can introduce themselves compliant with 19<sup>th</sup> century social protocol. Dickens has given the reader a sub plot around this point. Lady Dedlock has taken an interest in a local village girl. She is the orphan called Rosa and Lady Dedlock gradually brings her into her closest circle of servants. (Their first meeting is quoted above, page 95.) This is much to the annoyance of Hortense who is the currently the Lady's French maid. The public dismissal of the fiery Hortense in favour of the orphan at exactly this point in the novel is significant. Lady Dedlock is unconsciously acting out her emotional reaction to the loss of her first baby by 'rescuing' Rosa. It is likely that Rosa is the same age as Lady Dedlock was when she conceived Esther. The overt communication of her choice in front of her actual relinquished child is a powerful scene.

As the story of Bleak House unfolds, Lady Dedlock's secret becomes more and more apparent to the reader. We are nearly half way through the novel when Dickens writes of Lady Dedlock in shock as she discovers that the baby she thought had died at childbirth had actually survived and been raised by her estranged and possibly emotionally disturbed sister.

"O my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!" (Dickens, 1853:469)

Again we read a description of the emotional pain of the relinquishing birth parent. The loss that she had held so secret for such a long time suddenly takes on a vibrant and terrible presence.

Towards the end of Bleak House, with her secret out and facing (what she assumed would be) rejection from her husband, Lady Dedlock becomes a searcher. Having denied the truth of her past relationships and feelings, she urgently, secretly and in disguise travels to see her daughter Esther for the last time. Like many birth parents Lady Dedlock wanted to have knowledge of and see her own child. Dickens writes that she trades her clothes with the village woman who appeared earlier in the novel. This is the same poverty stricken woman who had lost her own baby when Esther first met her. Dickens is again linking mourning and loss with adoption searching.

At some risk she travels on foot to see Esther but fails. She returns to London and in the climactic scene is found by Esther and the detective Bucket. Esther finds the dead body at the same graveyard Hawdon is buried in. Initially Esther thinks it is the village woman only to be devastated to discover that it is her birth mother.

“The gate was closed. Beyond it, was a burial-ground – a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. On the step of the gate, drenched in fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying – Jenny, the mother of the dead child”.  
(Dickens,1853:913)

The dead mother of the child is doubly presented.

“I passed on to the gate, and stooped down. I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother cold and dark”.  
(Dickens,1853:915)

#### John Jarndyce as an adoptive parent.

Quite early in the novel, John Jarndyce develops many nicknames for Esther. Using terms from popular songs and myths etc, he calls her by many endearing titles. Esther writes of herself ...

“Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden ... my own name soon became quite lost”.  
(Dickens,1853:121)

John Jarndyce is reflecting and/or contributing to the difficulties of identification which adoptees often face. How can one really know oneself without knowledge of one’s roots? How hard is it when something as constant as one’s name constantly changes?<sup>29</sup>

John Jarndyce is presented as a generous man in Bleak House. His material giving is however not always productive. He supports the radically irresponsible Skimpole and Mrs Jellyby who neglects her own children to arrange charity for distant Africa (telescopic philanthropy). His motivation for paying for Esther to go to school and then adopting her is never very clear in the book. His own description is less than convincing.

“I hear of a good little orphan girl without a protector, and I take it into my head to be that protector. She grows up, and more than justifies my good opinion, and I remain her guardian and her friend. What is there in all of this? So, so! Now, we have cleared off old scores, and I have before me thy pleasant, trusting, trusty face again”.  
(Dickens,1853:117)

In such a large and complex narrative as Bleak House there are inevitably loose ends and cul de sacs. Dickens never expands on the source of John Jarndyce’s income. However he shocks the reader in the early part of the novel without further elaboration when he describes John Jarndyce as the slum landowner of Tom-all-Alone’s. (Chapter 8:119) What is the observant Dickens doing here? Is he alerting us to the idea that there is a darker side to this generous and apparently selfless man? It could be argued that Dickens was observing that the adoptive parent is not always acting altruistically.

This adoptive parent John Jarndyce seems to have a difficult relationship with the past. He seems to want to eradicate it at times. For example as the three young people are on

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<sup>29</sup> Later in this work I will contrast Dickens with Ondaatje’s book ‘Divasdero’. Ondaatje also explore the theme of identity and also is interested in the meaning of name changes and mis-naming.

their way to their first meeting with John Jarndyce he sends a messenger to meet them before they arrive at Bleak House. He has written to them each separately and asks them to collude with his denial that they are more or less strangers to each other.

“I look forward, my dear, to our meeting easily, and without constraint on either side. I therefore have to propose that we meet as old friends, and take the past for granted. It will be a relief to you possibly, and to me certainly, and so my love to you.”  
(Dickens, 1853:80)

At the very first point of contact he wants them all to assume that they have in fact known each other. Dickens may be playing with the Victorian idea of giving without reward, but it could also be seen as an adoptive parent wanting to manage history and deny the importance of the children’s roots.

However, perhaps with the knowledge that John Jarndyce is a slum landowner and that the property he currently lives in came to him after the mental health crises and subsequent suicide of his uncle, it may also be that he wants to avoid his own past. By denying the reality of the past of the adoptees, he can also avoid remembering his own perhaps unpalatable history?

This theme of secrets and lies is a common one in novels dealing with adoption.<sup>30</sup> Some may even argue that it is an inherent part of the adoption process. Although adoption practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has tried hard to build in transparency, the essence of the story contains the shocking truth that one set of parents did not parent and a biologically unrelated set of parents did. Canham’s paper on Oedipus (2003) brings this theme to the fore with particular reference to adoption.

Early in the story, John Jarndyce tries to tell Esther about her background. He is remarkably ungenerous with the facts of her early years and we are not clear if this is because he genuinely does not know or because he feels uncomfortable with the truth (probably the latter). He speaks of receiving a letter from a woman caring for a little

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed one of the best modern films about adoption by Mike Leigh is entitled “Secrets and Lies” (1995, Film4).

“orphan girl then twelve years old”. The woman (the godmother / aunt) was explicit with John Jarndyce that she had “blotted out all trace of her secret past”. The arrangement becomes one in which John Jarndyce funds her education when the godmother / aunt dies. It leaves the reader with a sense of something missing. Why would this man take over the responsibilities of the orphan girl? Why is he not more informed about her origins?

When we recall that John Jarndyce spied on the girl at various points in her development, we get a flavour of an adoptive parent with a need to control. Incognito, he was in the same carriage on her way to her new boarding school. Esther writes,

“He did not speak to me any more, until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl, and to be studious; and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never, for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind”. (Dickens, 1853:38)

This ‘fly on the wall’ approach to observing his adoptee has as slightly sinister flavour. Is it John Jarndyce’s way of controlling and denying the reality of their actual relationship?

At another point in the book Esther is puzzled by the reaction of her adoptive parent. She writes of her observations of John Jarndyce’s reaction to her reference of him being a ‘father to her’...

“At the word father, I saw his former trouble come into his face. He subdued it as before, and it was gone in an instant; but, it had been there, and it had come so swiftly upon my words that I felt as if they had given him a shock. I again inwardly repeated, wondering, ‘That I could readily understand. None that I could readily understand!’ No, it was true. I did not understand it. Not for many and many a day”. (Dickens, 1853:277)

Dickens was not the first 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist to describe ‘guardians’ eventually marrying their wards (e.g. *Jane Eyre*). However he may be the first to explore the

darker side of the unconscious motivation of the adoptive parent. Could it be that John Jarndyce believes he is ‘rescuing’ the orphan whilst an eroticised dimension develops between himself and Esther? Literary critics have suggested that Dickens was laying a false trail for the reader. By hinting at one point that John Jarndyce was the biological father of Esther and therefore at the potentiality of an incestuous relationship, he gripped the reader to stick with the complex story<sup>31</sup>. From other themes within the book however I would suggest that the very observant Dickens was using the double narrative technique to explore the deeper unconscious motivations. His brave attempt to suggest that not all philanthropists are *entirely* philanthropic can contribute to another understanding of the complex psychology of the adoption triangle. (Modern practitioners in the field of adoption are sensitive to this phenomenon of sexual attraction within the adoption triangle. Greenberg 1993, Kirsta 2003).

When John Jarndyce did propose marriage to Esther, he managed to do so in a confusing manner.

“It was not a love letter though it expressed so much love, but was written just as he would at any time have spoken to me ... It told me that I would gain nothing by such a marriage, and lose nothing by rejecting it; for no new relation could enhance the tenderness in which he held me, and whatever my decision was, he was certain it would be right”. (Dickens, 1853:690)

Could it be that Dickens wanted to convey the covert eroticisation of the relationship by John Jarndyce? It certainly allowed Esther to accept the proposal and deny her feelings for Woodcourt. Literary criticism has many points to make about Esther’s marital decision. From a psychoanalytic point of view of the adoption triangle, we might hypothesise that Esther was so defended against her own sexual life that she chose to deny her own sexual preference. The fantasy of sexually acting out (like her birth mother) had to be so controlled that she opted for the asexual or father figure of John Jarndyce.

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly the second novel used to explore the contributions of the novelist to the understanding of adoption (Divisadero by Ondaatje) also contains a sexual relationship that has an incestuous flavour. Although Coop and Anna are not biologically related, they have grown up together as siblings in the same family and enter into a sexual relationship that tears the family apart.

The move back from a sexual to a more paternal role is illuminated later in the book when John Jarndyce (Chapter 64) releases her from the plan to marry, gives her a replicate Bleak House and his good wishes to marry Dr Woodcourt instead. Esther weeps in gratitude (or confusion) as John Jarndyce says he will be her father now.

“I clasped him around the neck and hung my head upon his breast and wept. “Lie lightly, confidently here, my child,” said he, pressing me gently to him. “I am your guardian and your father now. Rest confidently here”. (Dickens,1853:964)

Interestingly as the book ends we see that Ada gives birth to Richard’s child just after he dies and John Jarndyce takes her and this child back to the (first) Bleak House. John Jarndyce has another adopted child in his home. The cycle continues?

“Both houses are your home, my dear”, said he, “but the older Bleak House claims priority. When you and my boy are strong enough to do it, come and take possession of your home”. (Dickens,1853:986)

### Concluding Thoughts.

Bleak house is an immense piece of work and is a complex story with many dimensions. The point of this chapter is to argue that Dickens used his skill as a close observer of humanity to illuminate many themes about adoption. He clearly understands the preoccupation with each other that is part of the triad of adoption. He describes many of the phenomena of searching and reunion. His work has an awareness of the functional (Esther) and dysfunctional (Richard) defences of the adoptee as they struggle with primitive loss. He grapples with the darker side of adoption when he tries to probe the eroticisation of nurturing relationships. In short Dickens is contributing to the illumination of the adoption themes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that are still relevant today.

## **Chapter Seven**

### Adoption themes in Divisadero.

“She wanted to fold the two halves of her life together like a map. She imagined her father, standing now on the edge of the cornfield, his white beard speckled by the shadows of the long green leaves, an awkward, solitary man, hungry for the family he had brought together and then lost – his wife in childbirth, this orphan son of a neighbour, and Anna, whom he had loved probably most of all, who was lost to them forever. There was just herself, Claire, not of his blood, the extra daughter he had brought home from the hospital in Santa Rosa”. (Ondaatje, 2007:164)

### Introduction.

Exactly 155 years separate the magazine publication of Bleak House (1852) by Charles Dickens and Divisadero (2007) by Michael Ondaatje. Contrasting the two works in order to discover how writers of fiction illuminate the central themes of adoption and searching in particular might seem initially an impossible challenge. Both authors appear to inhabit such different epochs that perhaps the contrast is too great. Dickens lived in 19<sup>th</sup> century London when the consequences of the industrial revolution on the fabric of society were becoming clear. Michael Ondaatje lives in post-industrial 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada with very different strains in society. Societal mores are very different and at least superficially it would seem that Dickens was more constrained in the range of subjects that he could present explicitly to his readers.

Obviously the biographies of the two men are very different. Dickens experienced poverty as a child and was sent to work in a blacking factory at a very young age. His father was briefly in prison for debt. Dickens tried very hard to keep this a secret from his adoring public. They were also experiences that clearly coloured his politics and his writing style. In Bleak House we can see that there was an overtly political perspective and certainly public health standards are a recurring theme. It may also have given him an insight into the consequences of fractured relationships.



There is also now good evidence of Dickens' 13 year clandestine relationship with a young actress, Nellie Ternan. Dickens spent much energy trying to keep this out of the public domain (Douglas-Fairhurst 2011, Slater 2007, Tomalin 1991, 2011). His infatuation with this woman 27 years his junior and the strain of trying to maintain a public appearance of Victorian morality, may have contributed to his talent for describing a range of human interactions and complex emotional states. With this relationship (sexual or a-sexual) Dickens was certainly charting non-mainstream territory in Victorian society. Perhaps his 'outsider' status facilitated his keen talent for observation of the minutia of human life.

Ondaatje was born into an affluent Sri Lankan family of Dutch, Tamil and Sinhalese stock. Ondaatje's memoirs (1982) describe his 'larger-than-life' father as an alcoholic and when he was aged 5, his parents separated. After his mother went to live in London, there was a period when he was placed with relatives.

"My memory is very vivid, of being quite solitary, though not alone – I was scattered with uncles and aunts" (Jaggi, 2000:2)

He moved to live with his mother in the UK at the age of 11<sup>32</sup>. Being re-united with his mother unfortunately entailed leaving behind his beloved ayah (nanny). An interviewer reported his responses to that loss...

"He also began to excavate his own buried origins. 'I see the world as utterly dangerous', Ondaatje has said, 'that it's a very tenuous, accidental world and what you love, especially the people you love, can be swept away in an instant.' He dedicated Handwriting<sup>33</sup> to the ayah, or nanny, from whom he was wrenched as a child, 'a lost almost-mother in those years/of thirsty love'. 'I remember leaving Sri Lanka and being devastated by leaving her,' he says sadly. 'When I went back she'd died.'" (Jaggi, 2000:5)

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<sup>32</sup> In 2011 Ondaatje published a novel 'Cat's Table' which elaborates on this journey from Sri Lanka to the UK that he took as a child. Like many of his novels it is only partly based on fact (McCrum 2011).

<sup>33</sup> This is Ondaatje's book of poetry published in 2000.

As a young adult aged 19 he emigrated to Canada. That experience of relocating from Sri Lanka to London to Canada clearly had an impact on his creativity. He is quoted as describing it in this way ...

“There’s a parallel between the writer and the migrant: in a way, writers are immigrants if you’re writing about a new place. It’s exciting and terrifying to start anew in a new land, with a new language and new rules”. (Jaggi, 2000:6)

Whilst studying at Universities in Quebec and Toronto he evolved into a writer in the genre of experimental literature. His elliptical and non-linear approach to writing stands in contrast to the manner in which Dickens wrote episodic yarns. *Bleak House* was first published in instalments in a magazine and inevitably this impacted the manner of presentation. The reader had to be gripped at the end of each section (Tomalin 2011). Ondaatje is on record as saying that his work is ‘cubist’. He deliberately circumvents the chronology of a story and moves through time using different styles and perspective. In the last chapter of his book Ondaatje pulls various themes together that have intertwined over space and time. One of the characters called Anna speaks initially in the first person but the narrative moves quickly into the third person in a confusing, effective and evocative way. Ondaatje is quoted in an interview referring to the state of fiction writing in this way.

“The novel has been quite slow in picking up what the other arts are doing. ... For years they have been doing things that are much more suggestive, much freer of chronological sequence”. (Menand 2007:4)

However there are similarities between Dickens and Ondaatje that may allow us to compare and contrast the subjective experiences of adoption and searching in particular. One of the similarities in both writers is that they explore the manner in which early experiences shape subsequent relationships. They both agree that one’s identity is formed in complex interactions of the past and the present. They both suggest that searching for roots is particularly important perhaps especially for all involved in the adoption triangle. They both describe a negative impact on mental health when loss is overpowering.

### Divisadero.

Where Dickens utilises and innovates with the double narrative in a mostly chronological *Bleak House*, Ondaatje adopts a quite different style. Whereas Dickens contributed to the 19th century development of the novel as an art form (Chesterton 1906), Ondaatje almost abandons the novel structure. Warner describes his style in this way,

“Ondaatje’s novels are always a worldly, calm but labyrinthine seeking of correspondences; they use the scaffolding of conventional narrative and then kick all the support away to discover what can stand alone and what is manifested in new form”.  
(Warner, 2007:1)

Throughout his work (novels and poetry) many of the characters Ondaatje creates have been separated from something or someone. Often he portrays the manner in which they search for the lost or missing component. In this novel *Divisadero* the focus is often on the search by members of the adoption triad.

He writes in an oblique manner and weaves in and out of the present and the past. The omniscient narrator is abandoned. He intertwines two main stories in a three part book and the two worlds mirror each other across time and the continents of America and Europe. Some of the criticism of this novel is that it is actually two unrelated novellas. However, careful reading picks up many themes and links between disparate characters facing similar loss, struggles with identity, fears and traumas. In *Divisadero* he has a particular emphasis on the impact of the past on the present despite flight and denial.

The curious title of the book is also multi-layered. Although we never meet Anna at this point in her development, apparently she lived on Divisadero Street in San Francisco. It was the boundary between the city and the fields of the Presidio. However we are told that it might also refer to the word ‘divisar’ meaning to gaze at something from a distance. In this way the reader is invited to think about divisions, boundaries, distance and perspective. It is Ondaatje’s way of weaving past with present. Of meaning both

separation and a distant gaze. The writer has managed to convey quest like searching and separation.

Throughout the book there is an eloquent exploration of identity. One strand of this appears in a scene in which there is confusion of character's names. Whilst they are children, one sister has an accident in the stables with a disturbed horse. In a disoriented state she is bleeding from a head wound and immobile. Her sister joins and is also injured by the horse. The adoptive brother rescues them but in the process confuses the girls leaving them momentarily perplexed about their own identities. In a similar vein, the reader notes that the father of this blended family is never named and the adoptive brother is referred to only by the surname of his birth family. Ondaatje is bringing attention to the importance of the past in our identity and the dynamics of identity in adoption.

See appendix seven for a brief plot synopsis of *Divisadero*.

See appendices eight, nine, ten and eleven for the genograms of the family structures used by Ondaatje.

### Coop as adoptee.

Ondaatje illuminates the inner worlds of his characters in many different ways. The child at the age of 4 years who observes the murder of his own family and is then adopted by neighbours, never quite achieves deep emotional contact with the family. Perhaps his defence against further loss is to remain distant from the substitute family. This is not an uncommon picture in adoption after adversity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hodges et al 2003a, 2003b, 2010 have reported some preliminary finding from research into the inner world issues of adopted children. Their findings suggest that the adopted child assumes that the good adoptive parent will confirm earlier experiences and to avoid this, they keep a defensive distance.

Coop's adoptive mother was co-incidentally interviewed by archivists from the University of Berkley before her death. When the girls found the monograph of the transcriptions, this is what the adoptive mother had to say about Coop.

"There was a terrible violence on the farm next to ours. The Cooper family was killed by a hired hand who beat them to death with a wooden board. At first no one knew who had committed such an act, but their son had hidden in the crawl space under the floorboards of the house for several days. He was four years old and he came out eventually and told who had done it. We took the boy in, to stay and work on the farm". (Ondaatje, 2007:10)

The link with the feared hired hand announces the later theme of how the adoptive father will treat Coop. Coop seems to stand for the killer farm hand in the minds of the adoptive parents. Ondaatje has managed to capture something about the fantasy (and phantasy) that the 'bad' birth parents will emerge through the adoptee.

The teenage Anna describes her adolescent adoptive brother in this way;

"Who was Coop, really? We never knew what his parents were like. We were never sure what he felt about our family, which had harboured him and handed him another life. He was the endangered heir of a murder. As a teenager he was hesitant, taking no more than he was given. At dawn he'd come out from one of the sheds like a barn cat, stretching as if he's been sleeping for days, when in fact he had returned from a pool hall in San Francisco three or four hours earlier, hitchhiking the forty miles back in the darkness. I wondered even then how he would survive or live in a future world." (Ondaatje, 2007:16)

Ondaatje quotes Lucian Freud "Everything is biographical". He could be presenting a novelist's view of object relations theory when he writes,

"What we make, why it is made, how we draw a dog, who it is we are drawn to why we cannot forget. Everything is collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border we cross". (Ondaatje, 2007:16)

The space between the traumatised Coop and the distant adoptive father is filled with the ghosts of the murdered birth family and the dead wife and mother of Anna. The disconnection between the adoptee Coop and the adoptive father manifests itself in adolescence. In this quote the adoptive sister is contrasting the risk-taking Coop with the adoptive father's lack of spontaneity.

“Coop preferred metal, the smell of it, oil in a crankcase, rust on a chain, all those varieties and moods of mental life. Reviving a car brought with it the possibility of another life, whereas this family rarely left the farm. The father had once ventured across the border into Nevada and spoke of it still as something foolish and unnecessary, perhaps dangerous”. (Ondaatje, 2007:24)

The two males in this family unit never quite digest their loss and connect with each other. When the annual photograph of Anna and Claire is taken beside the place on the farm where the mother is buried, it never includes Coop. The adoptive father, Mr Mendez, excludes his adopted son in the ritual surrounding the painful anniversary of his wife's death. The tension between the father and son is palpable.

“Since the death of our mother it was Coop who listened to us complain and worry, and he allowed us the stage when he thought we wished for it. Our father gazed right through Coop. He was training him as a farmer and nothing else”. (Ondaatje, 2007:9)

What is Coop's reaction to this? At times, he acted as a much admired older brother and bulwark between the father and the girls as young adolescents. However his risk taking becomes more and more apparent. The young man develops an interest in the gold rush history of the environment that surrounded him.

“Everything about gold was in opposition to Coop's life on our farm. It must have felt to him that he came from nowhere, the horror of his parents' murder never spoken of by us. He had been handed the habits and duties that came with farm life ... But gold was euphoria and chance to Coop, an illogical discipline, a tall story that included a murder or mistaken identity or a love affair”. (Ondaatje, 2007:13)

At one point he becomes a diver using pneumatic hoses to search for the remaining gold. He injures his back in this high risk endeavour. A reckless sense of adventure and high material gain drives Coop.

“But Coop loved risk and could be passive around danger. He’d been gathered into this fold by a neighbour whose wife died a few months later in childbirth. He knew all things were held in the palm of chance”. (Ondaatje, 2007:24)

The sexual relationship between Anna and Coop is not strictly incest. There is no blood relationship between the 16 year old girl and the young man in his early 20s. However they have been brought up together in the same family and a clear boundary has been breached. Ondaatje tackles the subject of sexual attraction within reconstituted families<sup>35</sup> in his usual indirect manner. He glancingly refers to it in various ways without plunging into the difficult subject.

“There were days they barely touched, when they would try to talk themselves out of this desire, and there were days when she would bring her book and there was no reading, no talking, in this sparse cabin that was colourless. One afternoon she brought an old gramophone that she had found in the farmhouse, along with some 78s. They wound it up like a Model T and danced to ‘Begin the Beguine’, wound it up and danced to it again. The music made them belong to another time, no longer a part of this family or place” (Ondaatje, 2007:28)

The inner struggle of both Anna and Coop to manage their feelings about this secret sexual relationship comes through this description:

“Some afternoons she spoke to him in an earnest schoolgirl French-as though she were not someone who had grown up alongside him, almost a sibling. Or she’d move away from his desire and read him a description of a city. Sometimes she snuggled against his brown shoulders and after making love burst into tears. There were times she needed

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<sup>35</sup> Sexual attraction between adoption triangle members is well known. (Greenberg 1993, Kirsta 2003) It is also interesting to cross reference this novel with Dickens’s description of John Jarndyce’s proposal of marriage to his adoptee Esther in *Bleak House* (see chapter 6).

this boy or man, whatever he was, to cry as well, to show he understood the extremity of what was happening between them.” (Ondaatje, 2007:29)

Ondaatje also manages to capture something very important in the relationship between Coop and his adoptive father. The undigested losses on both sides and the lack of emotional contact make it impossible for this father and son to negotiate. It bursts into graphic violence when the father discovers a sexual relationship between Coop and Anna. With the history of his own observation as a child of the brutal attack on his birth parents, Coop cannot retaliate. With the sudden realisation of Anna’s sexuality<sup>36</sup> and little mourning for his wife, the father explodes in uncontrolled fury.

“The boy fell back through the collapsing wall of glass into the cabin. Then he stood up slowly and turned to look at the man who had raised him, who was now coming towards him again. He didn’t move. Another blow on his chest knocked him onto his back. Anna began screaming. She saw Coop’s strange submissiveness, saw her father attack Coop’s beautiful strong face as if that were the cause, as if in this way he could remove what had happened. Then her father was kneeling above Coop, reaching for the stool again and smashing it down, until the body was completely still”. (Ondaatje, 2007:31)

After the discovery of the sexual relationship with Anna, the family unit dissolves and Coop flees never to see Anna again. He becomes a professional card player and drifts around the gambling casinos of Tahoe. From an adoption perspective we might see this as his reaction to the further trauma of loss of his adoptive family and his search for identity.

As noted in chapter three, the adoptee has more psychological work to do to form an identity (Brinich 1995). The adoptee in adolescence is pushing against non-biological parents in order to form his own identity and the exact nature of the biological parents is unclear. Ondaatje has created a good example of a traumatized adolescent adoptee struggling to find his own identity.

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<sup>36</sup> We might build a hypothesis about the oedipal nature of negotiating your child’s sexuality and how complex that can be when the adoption may have clouded the boundaries etc.



Later in the book, Coop manages to link up with a loose collection of professional card players who can offer companionship without intimacy.

“Cooper didn’t know the movies they were talking about. The others were in their thirties and forties, he was the youth among them. They watched over him, knowing him as a compulsive risk-taker, dangerous even to himself. But what he could do, which surprised them, was imitate the way each of them played, as if he were speaking in tongues. Though in the mania of a game, when you had to be calm, Cooper could be either startling or foolish. Someday he might be their skilled heir, but it felt to them that for now he was still in hand to hand combat, mostly with himself”. (Ondaatje, 2007:44)

We can see that the character of Coop created by Ondaatje has experienced many losses. His adoption gives him the opportunity for nurture that was dashed when his birth parents were murdered. Cruelly this is lost again when his adoptive mother dies. The final blow is catastrophic. His adoptive father attacks him and the adoptive family dissolves. Faced with this overwhelming loss, he defends himself against any intimacy. His search for an identity leads him to choose to bluff and cheat professionally as a card sharp.

When Coop is in hiding after his dramatic win over the rival card gang, he works hard at not engaging with others or the world. He lives in a demimonde of hotel-living and restaurant-eating before playing cards all night with amateurs and strangers. However, gradually he notices a woman in his favourite restaurant who appears twice per week with a partner. He looks at her from afar and only very slowly the woman makes a link with Coop.

It is true to say that Coop is defended against intimacy and that his awkwardness as they gradually form a couple is well captured in this quote:

“He had been able to witness her more clearly when she sat at the other table, at an angle from him. This close he had to keep up his end of the talk and also think before offering his answers. This close too many other things existed between them” <sup>37</sup>  
(Ondaatje, 2007:115)

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<sup>37</sup> Ondaatje is again bringing our attention to the theme of gazing at things from a distance.

He is certainly relieved to discover that she is already preoccupied with her own addictions.

“If Bridget sucked a milky-white smoke up through a water pipe or put a needle into her veins, if she found more pleasure in that than romance, it meant he would not be important to her. He would remain at most a fragment in her week. She might, he thought, not even recall him a few months from now. As a competent gambler, his instincts told him she would not be a danger to him”. (Ondaatje, 2007:116)

Ondaatje has captured something about the need Coop has to defend himself from what he perceives as the danger of relationships.

So Coop wrestles with his defences and manages to have an intimate relationship with Bridget but only a sexual one when she is stoned. The ghosts of the past appear to circle him...

“Once he opened his eyes to see her a few inches away, watching him, and he feared suddenly that she looked like Anna. He did not know whether she was a lens to focus the past or a fog to obliterate it”.<sup>38</sup> (Ondaatje, 2007:118)

#### Claire as an adoptee

Claire’s adoptive mother was only 23 years old when she died giving birth to Anna. Ondaatje, in letting loose a few clues, hints at the impact of the loss on the adoptive father. In his grief he adopts the infant Claire and this context becomes the psychological terrain for Claire’s subsequent searching for identity. Referring to the transcript of an interview with the adoptive mother and what is not contained in the text, Ondaatje highlights loss and absence again for the reader.

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<sup>38</sup> Once again we see Ondaatje suggesting to the reader that identity and its confusion is a complex interaction of past and present.

“It was here in this book that we discovered the woman who had died the week Claire and I were born. Only Coop, among the three of us, who’d worked on the farm since he was a boy, had known her as someone alive. For Claire and me she was a rumour, a ghost rarely mentioned by our father, someone interviewed for a few paragraphs in this book, and shown in a washed-out black-and-white photograph.” (Ondaatje, 2007:9)

Ondaatje digs deeper into the loss to explore the impact of the loss on the father.

“What is not in the small white book, therefore, is the strange act of our father during the chaos surrounding her death, when he took on informally the adoption of a child from the same hospital where his wife was giving birth - the daughter of another mother, who had also died – bringing both children home and raising the other child, who had been named Claire, as his own. So there would be two girls, Anna and Claire, born the same week. People assumed that both were his daughters. This was our father’s gesture that grew from Lydia Mendez’ passing. The dead mother of the other child had no relatives, or was a solitary; perhaps that was how he was able to do this”. (Ondaatje, 2007:11)

It is interesting to note that the research into adoption placement often comments on the need to avoid ‘replacement’ children (Dance et al 2010, Hopkirk 2002). Unless a death has been grieved properly the psychological risks of replacing a lost family member with an adoptive baby can be significant<sup>39</sup>.

Claire started life almost as a twin. Her closeness to Anna faded when Anna started a sexual relationship with Coop. It changed more abruptly after the fight and Anna and Coop took flight in different directions. What was Claire’s reaction to this family division?

“Anna and Coop and Claire. The three of them, she had always believed, made up a three-panelled Japanese screen, each one self-sufficient, but revealing different qualities or tones when placed beside the others. Those screens made more sense to her than single-framed paintings from the West that existed without context. Their lives, surely, remained linked, wherever they were. Coop had been adopted into the family in much

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<sup>39</sup> Howe 2007 suggests that unresolved grief is a factor in adoption placement difficulties.

the same way that she had been taken from the hospital in Santa Rosa and brought home beside Anna. An orphan and a changeling ... they had evolved, intimate as siblings, from that moment. She'd lived one of her essential lives with Coop, and she could never dismantle herself from him". (Ondaatje, 2007:156)

When we meet her next she is an adult with a close relationship with her boss Vea the local Public Defender. This man is a troubled Vietnam veteran but is able to provide something that Claire needs to hold herself together.

"Claire felt that Vea had implanted a cause in her, a guiding principle for what she could do with her life, and so she would do anything for him." (Ondaatje, 2007:105)

Like Coop's discovery of a group of card players to give him just enough nurture without intimacy, Claire has found something in her work and her colleagues and employer. She acts as Vea's researcher by gathering details of other people's lives secretly and specialises in uncovering mitigating circumstances. Claire's narrative describes Vea ...

"He was brilliant at freewheeling the possibilities, conceiving and laying out angles for defence. By nine-thirty they'd go off to their phones, talking to anyone in the defendant's past – school friends, lovers, employers. Then they'd investigate the victim. There might be a hint of violence in the victim's past that could turn the case. They carried an obvious notebook and a hidden microphone. They were better than cops, Vea said. And they were a family". (Ondaatje, 2007:102)

Thinking about the inner world of this adoptee, we could hypothesise that her career choice had something to do with a search for the real meaning of relationships. As an infant her birth mother dies and she is adopted and then when she is 16, the substitute family implodes possibly confirming the fantasy (and phantasy) that intimacy was dangerous. Perhaps her choice of career was the way she had of exploring and trying to make sense of what people mean to each other.

Comparing the impact of the adoption and the terrible fight between the adoptive father and Coop, Anna acknowledged that she "is still fearful of true intimacy. Her past is

hidden from everyone” (Ondaatje, 2007:80. However she also senses that the adoption and the beating impacted the whole family.

“A wall of black light holds her away from it. But she knows it damaged all of them, including Claire. She can imagine her sister riding her horse in the Sierras, wearing small bells on her wrists to warn wildlife of her approach, conscious of all the possibilities of danger. Just as she herself works in archives and discovers every past but her own, again and again, because it will always be there”. (Ondaatje, 2007:75)

Claire’s struggle to deal with her experiences was also apparent in her risk taking. Claire crammed her time off work with secret outdoors activities.

“She and the horse climbed into hills that some part of her had always believed were her true home. Here she was uninterpreted by family life, could be dangerous to herself, feeling the thrill at coming upon a campsite at night after being surrounded by a ground fog, that divine state of being half lost, half bewildered, and conscious of a wisp of smoke from some campfire.” (Ondaatje, 2007:100)

Ondaatje captures something important about Claire’s search for an identity. She pushes herself in her outdoor activities and considers where she inherited this part of herself.

“Claire assumed some ancestor in her changeling blood had been a horse person. She rose from her limp into the stirrup and was instantly free of it. It was in this way that she discovered the greater distances in herself”. (Ondaatje, 2007:100)

Later, when Claire accidentally meets up with Coop and he has been beaten badly<sup>40</sup>, there is a poignant exchange between the two of them. She is caring for his wounds after the terrible physical attack and Coop has lost his memory. “His mind was this scrubbed table that could barely remember”. She has to remind him of his work and she

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<sup>40</sup> It was Claire who patched him up after the first beating from his adoptive father. Now for a second time she finds him after a beating and nurses him. Perhaps Ondaatje is nudging the reader to think about the adoptee as a ‘carer’ in the same way that Dickens wrote Esther Summerson being driven to focus on others.

recognises that there is a fundamental confusion in his perception of her. For the second time in the novel he has confused the sisters;

“You are a gambler. That’s what you do. Do you know my name?

He said nothing to her.

Do you remember me? Do you remember Anna?

‘Anna,’ drawn out as if it were a new word he must learn to pronounce.

Thank you, Anna, he said when she took the tray and the bowl that had held the eggs”.

(Ondaatje, 2007:152)

Ondaatje has again used this narrative device to explore the searching for identity that is part of the adoption process.

#### The Adoptive Father #1, Mr Mendez the Farmer.

Ondaatje weaves the story of this adoption around characters which are often implied more than explicitly detailed. Indeed we never even know the first name of this farmer. He writes of the impact of the tremendous losses in the adoptive father in this way:

“But he had refused, always laconic and silent about the landscape of his past. Even now, he and Claire circled the episode that led to the absence of Anna in their lives, never speaking of it. It was as if the loss of Anna had consumed him and then exhausted him, until he had in some way concluded his emotion, the way he had probably done after the death of his wife, when his daughters were too young to know about it. And even if the pain and his fierce love of Anna were still somewhere, loose in his skin, he and this remaining daughter would now be silent about it. The last time Claire had spoken of Anna, her father had raised his palm into the air with an awful plea for her to stop. There was no longer closeness between him and Claire; whatever intimacy had once existed had always been engineered by Anna”. (Ondaatje, 2007:99)

Ondaatje has captured the dynamic of splitting well in this creation. (See chapter three.) This writer of fiction has described the manner in which Mr Mendez has felt overwhelmed by the impact of his losses. His defence is to split it off and attempt to

ignore the experience. In many ways Ondaatje writes sparingly about this character but captures the enduring pain of such a life. Life without his wife is described by his daughter Anna;

“At that time, as sisters, we were mostly on our own. Our father had brought us up single-handed and was too busy to be conscious of intricacies. He was satisfied when we worked at our chores and easily belligerent when it became difficult to find us. Since the death of our mother it was Coop who listened to us complain and worry, and he allowed us the stage when he thought we wished for it.” (Ondaatje, 2007:9)

This bereaved man with few psychological tools for intimacy is painted by the author as difficult but not impossible to get close to. Ondaatje writes cunningly of the manner in which the children would find the right moments to find emotional proximity to their father in his exhaustion.

“Now and then our father embraced us as any father would. This happened only if you were able to catch him in that no-man’s-land between tiredness and sleep, when he seemed wayward to himself. I joined him on the old covered sofa, and I would lie like a slim dog in his arms, imitating his state of weariness – too much sun perhaps, or too hard a day’s work. ... To do such a thing in daylight would have been unthinkable, he’d have pushed us aside. He was not a modern parent, he had been raised with a few male rules, and he no longer had a wife to qualify or compromise his beliefs. So you had to catch him in that twilight state, when he ceded control on the tartan sofa, his girls enclosed, one in each of his arms. I would watch the flicker under his eyelid, the tremble within that covering skin that signalled his tiredness, as if he were being tugged in mid-river by a rope to some other place. And then I too would sleep, descending into the layer that was closest to him”. (Ondaatje, 2007:11)

Teasingly, towards the end of their part of the story, Ondaatje suggests, but never confirms that Claire manages to contrive a meeting between memory-damaged Coop and the now elderly adoptive father.

“She wanted to fold the two halves of her life together like a map. She imagined her father, standing now on the edge of the cornfield, his white beard speckled by the

shadows of the long green leaves, an awkward, solitary man, hungry for the family he had brought together and then lost – his wife in childbirth, this orphan son of a neighbour, and Anna, whom he had loved probably most of all, who was lost to them forever. There was just herself, Claire, not of his blood, the extra daughter he had brought home from the hospital in Santa Rosa”. (Ondaatje, 2007:164)

The author has found a way of describing the adoptee’s potential deep sense of not being ‘of his blood’, of being incomplete. An ‘extra daughter’.

### The Adoptive Father #2, Lucien Segura, the Writer.

In this complex book, the subtlety of the style invites re-reading. It is only after the initial digestion that some of the apparent minor points of the novel become clearer. For example the writer Segura is not only the subject of Anna’s research but also the character who adopts the young Rafael. Lucien Segura appears to have blunted his capacity to enter meaningfully into relationships throughout his adult life. His emptiness is communicated with this quote.

“Sometimes he lost that crucial part of that allowed him to feel secure. *Segura*. The irony of his name was not lost on him. The safe world disappeared”. (Ondaatje, 2007:223)

Ondaatje describes how Segura had thought he had an affectionate relationship with his wife until he read what she said about him in her diary. “He read a few pages and realized how each of them was truly invisible to the other”.

After leaving his family and setting up alone with the assistance of the travelling family, he manages to get in touch with his need of others through the adoption of the boy. The first of the two quotes suggest the manner in which Segura remains unattached.

“The old writer, seemingly at peace, thus casually suggested to Rafael a path he might take during his own life, and taught him how he could be alone and content, guarded from all he knew, even those he loved, and in this strange way, be fully understanding



of them. It was in a sense a terrible proposal of secrecy – what you might do with a life, with all those hours being separated from it – that could lead somehow to intimacy. The man had made himself an example of it. The solitary in his busy and crowded world of invention.” (Ondaatje, 2007:93)

In contrast to the message he gave Rafael about secrecy and the solitary, when the boy leaves him he appears to be crushed. His dormant capacity for loss is re-awakened and he feels he has ‘used up his life’ (Ondaatje, 2007:283). By opening himself up to a real relationship with the boy he seems engulfed in sadness. He seems to be back to the openness of his boyhood rather than the distant and aloof state of mind in adulthood.

“He does not feel this present life is real without the boy. The essential necessity of Rafael. They have shared things cautiously. He has reached for some fragments of his life to give to this almost adopted boy, and in return Rafael has described the eclipse he and his mother witnessed near Plaisance, its terrible wind that was more terrible than the darkness. And what Lucien wants now is a storm”. (Ondaatje, 2007:272)

With these thoughts surrounding him, in the very last chapter Lucien Segura appears to end his life by using the (known to be) damaged boat on his lake.

“Lucien pushes the boat free of the mud shelf and strides beside it through the cloudy water and climbs in. He turns his back to the far shore and rows towards it. He can in this way travel away from, yet still see, his house. Water laps up between the boards, and he feels he is riding a floating skeleton. He is able to distinguish the shape of his small home in the quickening dusk. He wants to stand, to see everything clearly, and at the very moment of his thinking this, a board cracks below him, like the one crucial bone in his body that holds sanity, that protects the road out to the future.” (Ondaatje, 2007:273)

### Final Thoughts

Many of the characters in this book are struggling with a missing part. It is as if there is a vital other half of them. The division of the title of the book is the leitmotif. The

adoptees Claire and Coop are certainly searching for something. For Coop the excitement of gambling has a searching quality. Claire searches in her occupation as a private eye and secretly in her solo wilderness horse riding. Both seem to fail in bringing the search to a conclusion. There is a hint that Claire is planning to re-unite Coop and their adoptive father at one point in the book. Perhaps in this she hoped that something might be 'found'.

The two adoptive fathers were engaged in a form of searching. Mr Mendez the farmer was perhaps looking to protect the echo of his wife in his birth daughter Anna. The adoption of Claire from the same hospital at the same time as the death of his wife might have been his way of trying to protect himself against another loss. Segura the writer was perhaps searching for his capacity to connect with people that had been lost since his boyhood. Since his eye injury he has been unable to properly connect with others. His family are more or less a mystery to him. However when he slowly gets to know the gypsy boy Raphael whilst searching for a new home, the idea of relationships comes back to him and he is overwhelmed by sadness and appears to take his own life when the boy leaves.

Ondaatje has a talent for finding the reference that communicates exactly what he means even if it is a subtle and complex notion. At one point he has the character Anna describe the interdependent nature of the past, present and future in this way...

"'We have art' Nietzsche said, 'so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth.' The raw truth of an incident never ends, and the story of Coop and the terrain of my sister's life are endless to me. They are the sudden possibility every time I pick up the telephone when it rings some late hour after midnight, and I wait for his voice, or the deep breath before Claire will announce herself". (Ondaatje, 2007:preface)

This quote from Nietzsche appears twice in the novel communicating something about how we construct our lives creatively to avoid the painful truth of existence.

In another section Claire describes a similar point...

“... how to accept the flawed barrier between cause and effect, how to see that the present continually altered the past, just as the past was a strange inheritance that fell upside down into one’s life like an image through a camera obscura”. (Ondaatje, 2007:104)

Anna ponders the nature of identity and links it to the structure of the villanelle.<sup>41</sup>

“It’s like a villanelle, this inclination of going back to events in our past, the way the villanelle’s form refuses to move forward in linear development, circling instead at those familiar moments of emotion. Only the rereading counts, Nabokov said. So the strange form of that belfry, turning onto itself again and again, felt familiar to me. For we live with those retrievals from childhood that coalesce and echo throughout our lives, the way shattered pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope reappear in new forms and are songlike in their refrains and rhymes, making up a single monologue. We live permanently in the recurrence of our own stories, whatever story we tell.” (Ondaatje, 2007:136)

### Concluding Thoughts.

Divisadero is a complex novel with many levels. This chapter has argued that Ondaatje used his creative writer’s skill to expand upon many of the themes of adoption. He describes many of the phenomena of searching. He describes the mixture of past and present in identity formation. He is able to contribute to the understanding of adoption relationships which fall short of nurture because of losses in the past. In short the novelist Ondaatje is contributing to the illumination of the inner world adoption themes.

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<sup>41</sup> The villanelle is a particular structure for a poem. Strictly speaking it should contain three tercets and a quatrain. It follows a special rhyming sequence but the key is that entire lines are repeated giving emphasis but also slight change to the meaning. Ondaatje the modern writer and poet is referring to a classical form to make the point that the past and the present interact.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Thematic analysis of the interviews.**

“... thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’. However, it is important that the theoretical position of a thematic analysis is made clear, as this is all too often left unspoken (and is then typically a realist account). Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of data, what they represent in terms of the ‘the world’, ‘reality’, and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:81)

A further description of the methodology of this research can be found in chapter 2. Needless to say the twelve transcripts have been examined many times in many different ways. The 9.75 hours of transcribed interviews were very detailed and took much focused work to understand some of the nuanced statements. The narratives were read with and without the audio tracks playing simultaneously. They were approached (as far as possible) without ‘memory or desire’ (Bion 1970). The narratives were then read looking for the expected themes (see appendix three and four) and as a result a distinction was made between the evidence that supported the existing theories and the swathe of data that seemed like new findings.

As noted in chapter two, thematic analysis became the method of exploring the data set. It was chosen for its flexibility but also its capacity to make sense of large amounts of data. It offered the potential for the latent meaning from the ‘defended subject’ to be captured in a disciplined manner.

“Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:78)

Each transcript was dissected, initial codes were collated and a search for themes was initiated. My method of doing this was to use the clusters of codes as a lens and go through each line of the transcript. Looking for the latent meaning of the interviewees began tentatively with broad commentaries of the data set. The commentary picked up interesting features of the story. Links were gradually made firstly to other sections of the same transcript and later to other transcripts. The commentaries were reviewed and edited many times as the twelve transcripts were put through this process again and again. In this way the deeper meaning of the stories gradually emerged.

Towards the end of the process and in order for them to be digestible, the documents were edited into data extracts and ‘commentaries only’. In short we moved from raw transcripts with every noise made by the interviewee and interviewer, to this same data with commentaries inserted. The next piece of work was to create documents with the relevant material only to support the commentary.

The amount of material became a logistical challenge. It became important to protect a substantial period of time in order to review and hold in mind all the details of the 12 stories. In the final thematic analysis period the interviewer regularly rented a study space away from home and over nine periods from 2011 to 2013, the interviewer reviewed all the data in its entirety in 10 hour shifts. It was only in this way that all the interconnections of the material could be held in mind and properly grasped.

The interviewer’s respect for the interviewee’s stories made the reduction of the unique aspects of each story into broad themes difficult. Many of the narratives contained contradictions. As transcriptions, many of them were grammatically difficult to fully understand. The inner conflicts of the interviewees were visible in the stories. The vocabulary, tone and the pace of the spoken narratives had to be gradually understood for each unique interview. Each story had to be wrestled with and only very slowly did the common themes start to emerge.

The researcher is a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist in the NHS and an Adult Psychotherapist in private practice. He is used to working with the transference in a number of different settings. The interviews were clearly *not* psychotherapeutic work but the experience of the interviewer in following the nuances of complex psychological

communication was an asset. For example, it allowed the interviewer to be aware of the projections and to silently try to make sense of them. The background experience of the researcher allowed the material to form patterns without it being prematurely pushed into preconceived formats.

### Phase One.

In phase one of the final thematic analysis periods, large sheets (63.5 x 76.2cm) were placed around the room and small 'post-it' labels were attached. Every time a passage could be cross referenced with another passage in another transcript, a theme was named and placed on a label. At the end of this process the themes were grouped together and some of the duplication was eliminated. By the end of this focused period, 37 themes had been identified.

Although the interviewer was theoretically reluctant to reify the adoption triangle (see chapter 1), for the purposes of getting a thematic analysis of the transcripts, this way of seeing the process of adoption was accepted.

### Phase Two.

This report was discussed often in the dialectical format of the tutorial and changed as a result. Many of the themes were conflated after further thought. The themes were gradually reduced to 32. The material was compared with the research question and the expected results. With a view to hypothesis generation, the remaining themes were divided into 'confirming existing theory' (16) and 'new findings' (16) and 'major' (12) and 'minor' (20).

- 'Confirming existing theory' was defined as material the researcher could anticipate based on his reading, experience and theoretical knowledge.
- 'New findings' was defined as data that did not appear in the current mainstream literature.

- ‘Major’ was defined as having a great many sections in the narratives to support the theme.
- ‘Minor’ was defined as being consistently present but in a limited manner.

The researcher intended the work to provide a richer understanding of the narratives and thereby a fuller understanding of the process of adoption. The fact that one of the largest sections was ‘New findings- minor’ (12) seemed to support this. The analysis of the material seemed to confirm much of the hypothesis in the current literature but it also led to hypothesis generation. This will be explored in more details in Chapter 10.

- Interestingly, most of the themes were present in some form from *all* the members of the adoption triangle (25). See appendix thirteen.
- Only one theme appeared in only two of the members of the adoption triangle (Birth and Adoptee).
- Six themes were unique to one adoption triangle group (Adoptive)
- See appendix fourteen for a detailed list of these themes.

Data extracts from the transcripts will be used to support the rationale for the theme. With such rich material single examples only will be used. (The reader will be aware that this is already by far the largest chapter.) To insert every passage would make the analysis indigestible. The choice of quote was driven by the clarity and fit with the theme. The reader will no doubt understand that the selection of quotes from the long and detailed narratives was an arduous process (the average for the 12 transcripts was 49 minutes long).

Themes common to *all* in the adoption triangle.

In this section (common to all in the adoption triangle) the list is in the order:

Confirming Major (8) Page 128-142

Confirming Minor (4) Page 143-149

New Findings Major (3) Page 150-156

New Findings Minor (10) Page 157-174

1.

Loss and mourning

Confirming / Major Theme

At the heart of adoption is the story of an infant not living with its parent. The leitmotiv of the whole adoption process is loss. The *birth parent* has physically and psychologically carried another human being and then lost it. For the *adoptive parent*, the reality of the adopted child can confirm the loss of the fantasy of the biological child never conceived. (Or the perfect adopted child that they were not matched with.) The *adoptee* grows up with an essential loss of growing up with birth parents (Hindle and Schulman 2008).

This loss and what we do with it is not surprisingly part of the narrative of adoption and many versions of it were captured by the interviews for this research. Often it was not even clearly related to the adoption process. It was often a heightened sensitivity to loss and mourning in *all* areas of their lives.

Adoptee#2 was tearful in the interview about the death of her adoptive father. Later in the interview she refers to her tears earlier and speaks generically about all her losses having not been ‘dealt with very well’.

“And it’s interesting you know I got a bit tearful earlier on and that’s around my bereave...you know losing my father when I was young, not my mother, not the most



recent bereavement. And I think it's because that wasn't really, we didn't really deal with it very well".

Birth parent#1 felt the loss of her child physically. She had a somatic sense of the loss being carried on her back.

"She was always just on my back, I couldn't see her in front of my face but she was always there and she came right in front of my face very quickly depending on what was happening in my life..."

Adoptive parent#4 begins her story with her own loss and infertility. The actual words suggest that it was a logical move but the tone of the delivery underlined that the starting point to adopt was based in the very real loss of her capacity to have children.

"...and so when we, erm, we met, sort of in our late 30s and er, you know I'd, with a previous partner I'd wanted to have children, tried to have children, it didn't work out. And I spoke to M (*husband*) about it and we just very quickly moved onto the idea of adoption. Erm and it just seemed completely the right thing to do".

2.

### Incomplete

#### Confirming / Major Theme

The academic literature about adoption often describes adoptees feeling incomplete. It is posited by some that the adoptee's experience of not being cared for by the birth mother causes a sense of absence (Brodzinsky and Schechter 1990). It was certainly part of many of the narratives of adoption in this research. The strong feeling of something unknown being missing is reported often in these interviews.

Adoptee#3 felt incomplete. She describes how she had to have a conversation about adoption with her adoptive mother at the point when she was leaving home so that she could deal with the missing part and just get on with her life

“...so it’s just a burden thing I think with adoption sometimes that, that people don’t ...I don’t know... people don’t really get it... but think unless you are being honest with your child and talking about it all the time you can leave them with a sense of they have to carry something .....um that possibly they don’t, you know.

If you, if you can talk openly about it. But I never kind of felt like I, every time I wanted to get in there, something would happen, so ...

Yeah, but I also equally knew that when I left Mxx (*City*) I was really just leaving, you know I was leaving home and I knew that I wasn’t really going to go back hence why I’m here. But kind of, so I knew that I had to kind of address it because I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to then bury it again so I didn’t want to...I didn’t want to continually, it wasn’t a huge part of my life, but I just felt a sense that it was something that hadn’t been discussed properly. So...”

Birth parent#1 states this theme of feeling incomplete explicitly. She eloquently describes how the loss of her infant daughter was with her throughout her life as a very strong feeling.

“...very, very strong feelings of loss. Erm, painful feelings of loss really and erm, and wanting and wanting, wanting to know, feeling, again that feeling of being incomplete, you know lost, you’ve lost a bit of you...

Adoptive parent #3 described how she felt incomplete after her experience of working in film with lots of children. The sense of being lacking something important ‘niggled away’ at her.

“Right, um well I’m an adoptive mother. I made a television series which feat, featured children, um aged between seven and eleven talking about emotion, talking about the inner emotional world and I went through yards of footage seeing you know guinea pigs

for three hours and, and erm, hearing children talking about their friends and amongst all of this, erm, there weren't briefed as to what to say, they were just given a camera and told they could do anything they liked, talk about anything they wanted to, emerged a portrait of family life. And erm, I found that the footage stayed in my head and I couldn't, I couldn't get rid of it and we made a second series and I thought 'oh well when we've done the second series that will be out of my system. But it wasn't out of my system and I seriously began to think could I become a parent? So I started off reading some books that put me off and then I thought "oh they're so badly written..." the level of conversation around this, I'm not really...interested but I kept, it kept niggling away at me..."

3.

### Physical Similarity.

#### Confirming / Major Theme

This theme was strong in most of the stories. It seems to be an omnipresent phenomenon that people need to see the similarities between members of the family. At a deep level it would seem that human beings crave connectivity and this manifests itself in scanning others for physical similarities. Perhaps we seek physical similarity to forge links between the past, present and future generations. Many infant observation papers capture this importance of physical similarity between family members (Miller et al 1989). It is not surprising that adoption social work practice has for a long time tried to 'match' children and adoptive parents based on similarity (Dance et al 2010).

Adoptee#4 spoke about not particularly looking like her sister but having many common interests. However in the same section of the narrative she describes in detail how she does look like another member of the birth family, her maternal aunt.

"So I turned up in this outfit, she turned up in a black skirt and a black top and a black and white checked jacket. And I said "I can't believe this, I nearly put the identical jacket on". Marks and Spencer's best. ((laughs)) and she said "oh how strange" and it was just you know so funny that we, we thought alike, erm we both like theatre, we both have a lot of things in common and she kept saying, "you're so much like..." the

first thing that he and her husband said was “you’ve got our mum’s hands”. And I said “why do you say that?” and she said “are you good at craft work and knitting and sewing and stuff?” I said “yes”. She said “yes she was as well. I haven’t got her hands but you have”. And she said “her sister, M----- is exactly the same”, she said “in fact you’re just like Auntie M-----, mum’s sister” and my sister’s brother, er husband N----- said “you even sit like her, walk like her, talk like her, everything” he said “you’re so like her it is incredible”.

Birth parent #4 was shocked by how similar she looked to her daughter. She has secretly contrived a meeting with her daughter who does not know she is meeting her birth mother.

“...so I went to the reception desk, rang the bell, and this girl came out of the back, who looked so much like me it’s incredible, she’s my double. My feat...well a direct cross between myself and my father actually, because she’s very much my build, she’s quite tall and quite a big girl, like me. Erm, she’s dark colouring like me, but she had curly hair, like her dad had. Erm, so I sort of ...very much a cross between us.”

Adoptive parent #1 talks about how her adopted child is much taller than the birth parents. She describes a painful meeting with the birth parents during the adoption process. The adoptive mother describes the very careful scanning she was undertaking as she compared her adopted child with the birth parents.

“Um... ((pause)) um... so then... I didn’t know what to do because there she was crying, this young guy next to her, and only ..... she’s four foot eight or ten and he was only like five foot three, so I don’t know how X (*her adopted son*) has ended up six foot but um....”

4.

Guilt

## Confirming / Major Theme

Perhaps because the nature of adoption begins with a decision (for whatever reason) to circumvent the usual bonds of parent and child, there are many descriptions of guilt. In adoption, the first relationship of infant to mother has been changed and the sense that something has gone wrong appears to linger with all in the triangle. For example, the adoptees often feel that they have caused the parents to have them adopted. (See also Dickens's description of Esther in *Bleak House* and her idea that her own deficiencies led to her living with her Godmother / Aunt. See Chapter six.) Birth parents often report guilt at having given away their children. Adoptive parents often convey a sense of guilt for having a child that another set of parents brought into the world. This seems to be true in the broad academic literature (Tollemache 2006) and is certainly true in this research.

Adoptee#2 described a feeling of guilt about not letting her birth mother have more contact with herself or her family. The tone seems to communicate an idea that having no contact with her mother is, on balance, the right decision for her but still a sense of guilt permeates her description.

“And she, she, she, I... she doesn't, I don't think she, she doesn't sense that at all. Or she doesn't want that and I don't think she's got enough insight to pick up on what, where I'm trying to go so...  
...erm...so that's where we are really. But I don't feel ((pause)) I, I just feel sort of slightly numb about her really.  
So that's it.”

Birth Parent#2 feels guilty for not holding her baby immediately after it was born. Even though adoption was the only plan for the infant, when the ward staff invited the mother to hold the child, she declined. In retrospect she feels that her decision to refuse physical contact was wrong and contributed to something going wrong. Her description is very painful and she sobs as she breaks down in tears.

“I said goodbye to her in the hospital. I never held her. ((pause)) ((cries)) I never picked her up and held her because I didn’t... I thought if I do and I don’t feel anything, that’s bad. If I do feel something that’s worse ((sniffs)) So I just touched her and I watched the nurses feeding her. ((sniffs)). So I left hospital and I came home within a few months”.

Adoptive Parent #4’s story included a tone of guilt about the birth mother of her adopted child. She felt that the birth mother had not been properly understood by the authorities. They had removed her child from her care despite the birth mother having an attachment to the child. Presumably the standard of care fell below an acceptable standard. However this adoptive mother seems to have feelings of guilt about the removal especially as the removal of the child may have caused the birth mother’s death later.

“So there’s that side of it, so you know she lost some of the, the ... she, you know she didn’t want to give Z up, Z was taken away from her, erm, whatever happened within that family, erm, and however she treated Z or however she treated the older children, you know, she didn’t know, I don’t think she knew what she was doing and er it, you know from what I’ve read it was different things, she had strong feelings towards Z. It would have been devastating for her, and might have contributed to her early death, you know..... as I’m sure it doesn’t help you know in her situation. You know you go through a deva, devastating, emotional experience like that erm, I don’t think they, erm, I don’t think erm the birth family, or the birth parents ever understood really why social, Z was being taken into care. Had enough experience around people to understand, you know some people are just very chaotic er, they have their own frame of reference erm, they don’t deal with people in authority very well...and you know they don’t accept help very well. They, you know they have been brought up in a particular way which sets them up to behave in a particular way, it’s a massively complex situation.”

5.

#### Mental health issues

Confirming / Major Theme

It is true that adoptees are over represented in referrals to mental health agencies in both the USA and the UK (Brand and Brinich 1999, Brodzinsky 1993, Steele et al 2010). There may be complicated reasons for this (see chapter one) but it seems that pre-placement experiences of early adversity are the key factors.

In the earlier chapters we explored what Bleak House by Charles Dickens (chapter 6) and Divisadero by Ondaatje (chapter 7) said in various ways about the mental health issues of those in the adoption triangle. For example, the characters of the adoptees Richard Carstone in Bleak House and Coop in Divisadero both struggled to maintain good mental health.

The narratives for this research also found various levels of mental health issues in each corner of the adoption triangle. This manifested itself not only in symptomatology but also a preoccupation with mental illness in others and in general. Again it is perhaps not surprising when we consider the primitive nature of the loss embedded in adoption.

Adoptee#3 had invested a lot of energy into her search but the response was negative from the birth mother. She went “off the rails” when she heard that her birth mother wanted no contact with her. The tone and use of this common term was designed to communicate something about a breakdown of some kind.

“I don’t think I particularly handled it very well, I think I might have gone out and got completely drunk for six months or something. You know I think I really found it difficult to cope with but...it is hard for me to look back now and think... what did I get from it? I guess there is a big part of me still that thinks she might change her mind. Well not a big part, a little part but erm, I was just very shocked and I just assumed that ... she would want to see me. And I just think I probably lost it a little bit. Erm...((pause)) yeah got a bit, went a bit off the rails but also equally, I had a fantastic friend whose mother was adopted and she was a psychologist up there in Dxx (*city*) and she was just a huge support to me, I was able to speak to her and her mum came up from Pxx,(*city*) to speak to me about her own experiences of being adopted”.

Birth parent#3 felt that she had a 'breakdown' after giving up her baby for adoption. This woman eventually uses the word 'depression' and wanted the interviewer to know that her mental health was compromised immediately after giving birth and then leaving her baby for adoption.

"Oh, it, it...you, you just feel as if ((pause)) part of you has been amputated, you've lost something vital in your body. Erm.. it, it was Christmas when I got home and erm, I got through it but after Christmas I went through a period where I just sort of cried for days. Erm, ((pause)) erm... I can't remember quite how long but I did, I think I had a mini sort of breakdown, I just couldn't...well depression, call it what you will."

Adoptive parent #2 had a face to face meeting with the birth father in court. This woman became quite tearful in the interview as she recalled the mental state of the man and heard about his early adversity. She wanted to be compassionate about his circumstances but also talked about the court having to take a firm decision because of his mental health needs.

"His life went wrong. People judge people you know. And erm, I suppose thankful, you know my life could have gone wrong too...If I didn't have the background I had. I knew I had a really good mom and dad, he obviously didn't, you know he has a terrible background. Oh my God. You know if you read his background, you've got to have some kind of insight to think it's a hard life. ((pause)) you know".

6.

### Searching

#### Confirming / Major Theme

Most of the academic literature surrounding adoption refers to the phenomenon of searching (see chapter 4). It appears that the vast majority of adoptees at least consider searching for their birth parents (Feast and Philpott 2003, Lifton 2007, 2010, Schechter and Bertocci 1990). This might remain at the level of an intra-psychic search or move to



an activated search. It is such an omnipresent aspect of adoption that the training for potential adoptive parents includes some preparation for the search by their adopted children (Kaniuk 2010).

The narratives for this research also included many references to searching. Perhaps in slight distinction from the other academic literature, this research found strong evidence of references to searching in all three corners of the adoption triangle. The birth and adoptees stories often contained physical searches. The adoptive parent narratives however often referred to physical but also emotional and psychological searching for a child.

Adoptee#3 described the unsuccessful and painful search for her birth mother and how she is now focussed on the search for her birth brother. This woman spent lots of time and energy using various agencies to locate any blood relative.

“And then in the last year I’ve been trying to privately search for my, for my brother who I don’t know if he’s full blood or not but anyway, this guy called Pxx, um who would be five years older than me, so it’s been...I’ve been doing that more recently. I haven’t had much luck but I’ve still, every now and then, in fact this morning I’ve had an email from them saying you know do you want us to update your details, we’re doing different things, so, different things now, so yeah, so I sent that back but that’s my story in a sense.” (Laughs)

Birth parent#3 described her strong need to search. At a particular point in her family life she was completely overwhelmed by a desire to reach out to her adopted daughter. She describes how she hired a professional to track her daughter.

“...it wasn’t until the last, the second son left home that I developed very strong feelings... erm to find her.” “...she was found in a couple of days. And erm, I found out erm, that she was married and she’d had a son and a daughter so I was a grandma biologically speaking. Erm...((pause)) as soon as I got the details, I asked the researcher if she’d mind acting as an intermediary and pave the way for contact, which she did. And erm, as arranged I rang Vx but she said she was in shock actually, that I’d found

her and erm, she'd prefer that I corresponded. Erm, so I agreed to her wishes. Erm...and I just wrote a screed really, I just...poured my heart out."

Adoptive parent # 3 painted a picture of her growing need to have a child and how she battled with various bureaucracies. She eventually searched many cultures before finding her child in another country. Her eloquent description of the journey to meet him is reminiscent of a novelist's description of search. (For example Charles Dickens's section in *Bleak House* in which Esther searches physically across London for her birth mother Lady Dedlock.)

"... erm, he was actually two years, two and a half years old. And he'd lived in the same orphanage all of his life from the age of four and a half months. And it wasn't a very good picture of him but there was something about it, I thought 'mmm I can't get that out of my head'. So I decided well nothing lost, I'll go and have a look at him. I flew to R(*country*), did a 13 hour train journey and then a two and a half hour car journey to this tiny orphanage in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by snow. It was like being in some kind of, the Alaskan bit of a Bond novel, you know ... the cars all going really, really fast and, and skidding all over the road and it just felt really, such an alien environment, it was so strange, because a I'd only ever seen that on television or in films and suddenly I was in it. So I felt I was in a sort of mini drama ... just on the journey".

7.

### Identity

#### Confirming / Major Theme

How is an identity formed when the biological bonds of parenthood are ruptured? This is a question that appears often in the academic literature surrounding adoption (Hoopes 1990, Nickman et al 2005, Triseliotis 2000). We regard identity formation as a complex process that involves at least the introjections of the parenting experience. Clinicians,

theoreticians and artists have long been fascinated by the formation of identity when one is cared for by non-biological parents. (See chapter five.)

It was also an aspect of the narratives for this research. The triad members approached the issue of identity in different ways but it was clearly on the agenda for all.

Adoptee#1 talks a great deal about how he feels that his identity was formed by his adoption but he asserts that it is not a simple process. He feels that he was also formed by the specific culture of his birth parents and his adoptive parents. (These two cultures were related but separate and distinct.) He spoke at length about his many ideas about his own identity.

“Interestingly enough, I was adopted from the same country that my father is from and we lived here, so there was the kind of an identity with a country more than with people. I can always remember my father always saying to me and quite early on, because even though he is from the same country as me he is from a different part of the country as it were... I can remember him saying to me well, I can't tell you who your family are, because of course as a child I was interested in that, but I he said I can tell you who your people are and ...

Birth parent#1 describes in detail how she identifies with the image of a camel as she perseveres and slowly edges towards a re-union with her lost child. This woman's narrative was peppered with many allusions and metaphors. Her way of eloquently describing her identity as a birth parent patiently carrying her burden on a long journey is particularly apt.

“I'd always symbolically depicted myself as a camel for that sort of 30 years when I never saw her and the hunt and looking for her. Because a camel keeps going. You know because I was determined, I have always been determined to find her again, even though I didn't know I was able to search, I kept that hope in my heart that we would meet, you know, it was just so important to me, that.”

Adoptive parent #3 was eloquent in her description of her changed identity as a result of the adoption. The ‘normal’ process of these interviews is that a single question is asked and when it ends, the interviewer withdraws and reads his notes (see chapter two). In part two, specific questions are asked based on what was said in part one. This adoptive parent took control of the interview and insisted on making a formal statement before part two. She felt that she had not properly communicated how she had changed as a result of the adoption. In this simple but powerful way she described her identity as a career woman and how she has now become a mother.

“Um, the adoption of R is the most important thing I have ever done in my life. Erm, and I’ve been, always thought of myself as very career orientated and very project driven and I’ve been reasonably successful in quite a visible way. But I love R with an intensity that I had no idea I was capable of until, until I got him. And it’s changed my life. That’s what I wanted to say. I don’t know if I’d said that, I don’t think I had. But it’s true”.

8.

#### Life Cycle Events, Loss and the timing of search

##### Confirming / Major Theme

The term “life cycle event” refers to the major incidents in one’s life that changes the subject. As one progresses through the various stages of development (biological, psychological, societal etc) the manner in which we deal with the challenges particular to that stage is important. Various authors have conceptualised this in family therapy terms (McGoldrick and Carter 2003). Broadly we might see the family life cycle events as 1) Leaving home: single young adults. 2) The joining of families through marriage: the new couple. 3) Families with young children. 4) Families with adolescents. 5) Launching children and moving on. 6) Families in later life. Brodzinsky et al 1998 explicitly use this life cycle lens to explore searching in adoption

In this research many of the narratives included significant life cycle events which triggered a search. Each of the triangle members described facing these challenges and

coming to point at which they wanted to find something by reaching out. This theme seemed to be about the adoption triangle members working on loss in relation to the timing of the search. It might be stating the obvious that each of the narratives contained moving stories of people grieving and moving towards a search in relation to this.

Adoptee #3 postponed her search for her birth mother after her adoptive sister ran away from home. Even though this was an important search, she shelved it. It was if she had to get the timing of her search right for herself and the others in her adoptive family.

“I just, I just think, and I ...I come with... every time I felt like I needed to address something in me around the adoption, like talk to my mother about how I felt and how I felt that she you know...just be a bit more open with her about it, there seemed to be a major reason why I couldn't and that was...and I just felt that I had a lot of issues that I wanted to discuss with her and I had to kind of sit on them, bury them, I often felt that around my sister though, not just to do with adoption issues, she was always kind of the emotional one, you know kind of getting in there first really. So... and I, so, in that sense I just kind of took it all back inside me and just thought 'well you know I don't know... want to upset... but obviously she ran away and they fell apart and it was kind of just something again that I didn't want to add to...”

Birth parent #3 waited until she felt the loss of her youngest child leaving home before searching. Facing an empty nest this woman found she just had to search for her lost first child. The imperative nature of the drive was in the tone of the description.

“I mean I'd never stopped thinking about her but I could sort of deal with it, it was sort of in a place. But when the younger one left, I was absolutely consumed with it, I just had to find out what had happened to her.”

Adoptive parent #2 describes the moment in the life of the couple when she is faced with some enormous decisions. She grieves her own infertility before searching for a child through adoption.

“And that was my last step for getting a child because I couldn’t have my own children so I’d been through that process. And erm, I absolutely refused to have any fertility treatment, I absolutely refused um, so I just kind of felt, you know and I said to Dx (*partner*) “if it’s a no”... I mean you know we have to change our life and you know that felt really big and it also felt really pressurised because my husband is younger than me and he really wanted children. You know so I just thought ‘my God, I have got all that on my head”.

1.

## Anger

### Confirming / Minor Theme

With so much loss it is not surprising that the adoption triangle also contains much anger. The rage against the object for its absence is a well known phenomenon (O'Shaughnessy 1964). The primitive and early nature of some of the relationship endings in adoption can make the expression of anger a complicated task. This research picked up many versions of this.

Adoptee#1 spoke about his anger at being adopted into a warring couple and being given a reconciling role for the two adults. This man felt (at this point in the interview) that he was angry that he was made to feel in debt to his adoptive parents.

“You know. So. That's all right then but what happens eventually is that you get pissed off with that. You know. You get pissed off with feeling ... that you owe them. You know. So when you hit that teenage thing of when you are pissed off with feeling that you owe them anyway ... it's like, you feel ... you feel like you're pissed off ... you feel pissed off that you owe them ... PLUS! (*Stressed the last word*) you know what I mean? Super high octane. Insofar as, yeah... I know I'm adopted, when do I have to stop like owing you for that ... you know. And when do I have to stop being the ...sort of like, meat between the sandwich of your marriage?”

Birth Parent#3 had feelings of anger towards her daughter who will not meet her face to face. She was taken aback by the strength of her own feelings. She so desperately wanted to have a relationship with her lost daughter that when this was not reciprocated, she was furious.

“Terrible. I was so upset, in fact I was ((pause)) I was quite rude because I said to her, having read your correspondence to me, I, I thought you took after me in lots of ways, you have similar qualities to mine, but I can see now, you're unfeeling and insensitive and obviously take after your father. I shouldn't have said that, but that was me being

angry, I was angry. That, because at that point, I didn't, I thought that was the end of it, that I would never hear from her again."

Adoptive parent #3 was angry with the care system in the country she adopted from. She was well-informed about the culture and the deficits in the standards of the residential unit where her adopted son was living.

"And erm, my main feeling was I wonder what they're hiding? I wonder if they're slightly ashamed? I wonder if the children are ... the most extreme thought was I wonder if, I wonder if the children are kept locked up in rooms because they can't look, haven't got enough staff to look after them. Questions like that .....and, of course you just don't know. And erm, a friend of mine who's a GP who lives here, lived in R (*country*) for seven years and worked in the orphanages and she said often you'd find the children would be on mattresses on floor in one big room and that may not look so good so they might not have been very keen on letting you see that. So I think I was shown the front...like the equivalent of the front room, you know with the best china and that's all I saw. Um, this leaves question marks".

2.

### Replacement.

#### Confirming / Minor Theme

There is some evidence to support the idea that after a loss there needs to be a period of proper mourning before a child should be 'replaced' (Reid 1992, 2003). The undigested loss has a disproportionate and often negative impact from the past on the present. Adoption contains much loss and there can be a tendency to rush on past the mourning to simple replacement. This is why social workers make it a key part of the practice of recruitment and selection of adoptive parents to explore the capacity to deal with loss (Dance et al 2010, Kaniuk 2010).



The reader will recall that Ondaatje explored the ‘replacement’ theme in his book *Divisadero* (see chapter seven). The adoptive father whose wife died in childbirth was so full of the loss that he replaced his wife with a child from the same hospital whose parents were also dead. He adopted Claire to replace his wife and this act haunted their relationship throughout the book.

In this research the theme of replacement became clear in the narratives from all three in the adoption triangle.

Adoptee# 1 describes in passing how his birth mother had another child almost immediately after him and was able to keep that infant. This non-adopted brother remained with his mother and was still living nearby when a re-union took place decades later. This interviewee’s story was the longest and most detailed and yet he throws this fact into his narrative casually. The interviewer felt that it was a painful fact in the story despite its small cameo role in the description.

“It’s not really relevant to adoption but she had had a big row with my brother who ...er... whose S-ish (*nationality*) as well because I’ve got a brother who was 11 months younger than me that my biological mother kept... that’s a whole other story really, and so they all went off to A (*country*) to live with my grandfather”.

Birth parent#3 spoke about having a baby quickly after she gave her daughter up for adoption. This woman was devastated by her experience of having to give up her first child and quickly replaced this lost child.

“...the following year I met my husband and we got married and I went on to have two sons. And I never, ever forgot Vx, particularly on her birthday, but I did nothing, in fact I was quite fulfilled, I had a happy marriage, a good family and erm, I devoted my time to bringing my sons up.”

Adoptive parent # 1 adopted quite soon after she was told that she could have no other children. She was tearful as she described her loss and her way of managing it by replacement.

“...when I tried for another child I was told that I couldn’t. Also after the birth of my first child I was told I had a uterine defect, I had a xx (*infertility cause*) and that there was no chance that I could become pregnant again. Well, sorry, um, (*tearful*) when I started trying, I then had further tests done and I was told that there was no chance that I could ever become pregnant again.”

3.

### Difference.

#### Confirming / Minor Theme

This theme is about people subjectively feeling themselves to be ‘different’ from others in society. The internalisation of the two biological parent family may be less strong in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it was in earlier epochs (Bertocci 2008). Recent statistics from the ONS (Focus on Families 2005) suggest a rising percentage of children are not living with both biological parents<sup>42</sup>. Although it may be more common, there was still evidence that living outside the expected family form, led to many in these narratives to talk about feeling ‘different’.

Adoptee#3 described a very painful moment from her recent past. She has gone back to visit her adoptive father and she over hears him saying that he never felt his adopted children were his. His sense of ‘difference’ meets her own sense of this in an excruciating moment.

“But I went home to visit my adoptive father in February and actually he said to a friend, he didn’t realise that I was actually in the room, he thought I was completely somewhere else and he’d said to a friend that he erm never felt like we were his

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<sup>42</sup> “The total number of families reached 17 million in 2004, but the number of families headed by a married couple fell by half a million between 1996 and 2004 to just over 12 million”.

children. And my sister and I were there at the time and so for me that, that's brought up ((pause)) that again, so it's just pivotal moments when things change in your life ....  
...and that again has brought up a thing for me you know, that's interesting Dad because that's how I always felt and now you've just kind of nailed that feeling for me. So, I don't know why I wanted to mention that but I just...that's an important... ..kind of end, slightly ending for me and my thinking I just wasn't quite good enough for him and you know having that confirmed on that.....that level has kind of helped. Yeah."

Birth parent#1 talked about constantly feeling different from others. Her adopted infant was her 'disappeared baby' and her interaction with the world with this constant loss made her different.

"the experience of losing my daughter I mean and the baby, the disappeared baby, was always there, not far below the surface so that things in the outside world as I said, like seeing my brothers new born baby, sometimes on the street seeing babies that looked like her"

Adoptive parent #1 spoke of 'difference' in a business- like manner but communicated the essential difference between adopting and giving birth. In this section of the story she is describing giving birth to her first child, adopting two other children and then giving birth to her fourth and last child. The tactile nature of the last birth was different from the others.

"...And there wasn't any difference in how I felt for any of them. I didn't, with my oldest son, when he was born in Ix (*country*), he was put in an incubator and I was only allowed to ... I didn't see him for the first week at all and then I was, I was only allowed to see him through the glass of the nursery windows, so I didn't actually get to hold M until he was four weeks old so therefore... with F (*fourth child*) I could hold him straight away but ...the, the last one, um... and that was quite, quite a nice thing to do, you know to have them so tiny and um... but, but there was just no difference, but it wasn't that F was born and I sort of felt rejection for him, I didn't, I loved him the moment I saw him."

4.

#### Continuity and discontinuity

##### Confirming / Minor Theme

The academic literature surrounding adoption refers to a need for inter-generational links (Pannor et al 1974). The argument is that we all need to know what our past and how we interconnect with each other. The deep seated drive for generational links going back into the past and forward into the future is probably one of the key aspects of human living.

In this research a very similar theme was discovered. From a deep desire to have continuity through the generations to attacking and trying to deny the discontinuity; it came from all three sides of the adoption triangle

Adoptee#1 is a dramatic story teller. He found many ways to enliven his narrative about his search and reunion with his birth family. In particular he paints a picture of the sense of continuity that came to him on first meeting his birth family at the airport.

“In as far as .... it just suddenly occurred to me at that particular moment that my last physical contact with whom I was biologically related was 46 years previously! With AXX.(his birth mother) And I saw this clock just ticking down. And time..And I kid you not.. what's the word? Perceived time? Is that the one? Just slowed.”

Birth#1 described how her daughter who was adopted at birth had been found but wanted to take the reunion at a slow pace. She was in letter contact only with her long lost adopted daughter who sent her photographs. In the moment the images fall out of the envelope she has a split second sense that her adopted daughter's brother was her own son. In this way there is a fantasy of continuity between her lost child and her kept children.

“...a whole heap of photos fell out and one of them was of a little boy who looked for the life of me like my son, Sx. What’s he doing there...I couldn’t understand it. And then I opened the letter and it was a letter from Vx, a massive big, fat letter with lots of photographs. And erm what was interesting is that her brother, her adopted brother, when he was a little boy, looks like my son. It’s just really bizarre, but that’s true.”

Adoptive #3 describes the importance of continuity. She spends a lot of energy trying to find out the generational inheritance of her child. Locating him physically took an enormous search across many countries but she also needed to locate him in terms of continuity across generations.

“It was very hard to get any real information about him from the officials. You try every tack to get information because what you’re looking for is something about his background, um, I never found out anything about his father at all, I know that his mother was 39 when she had him erm and that erm, she’d had him for four and a half months and then he’d gone into hospital with a chest infection and then she’d put him in the orphanage for a year. Um, it’s very common practice in Russia because they don’t have a lot of um, fostering there, it’s a new concept to them. So if people are economically struggling they’ll put their children into an orphanage for an agreed amount of time and as long as they agree to visit the child, telephone and write letters and keep some kind of contact, their agreement will stand and then they come to the orphanage and take them back again. Well she never contacted the orphanage from the day he went in”.

**The following 13 themes are in the ‘New Findings’ category *and* across all three areas of the adoption triangle. They are described in this chapter and then used to generate hypotheses in chapter 10.**

1.

Triangular psychology.

New Findings / Major Theme

When psychoanalysis was more interested in drive theory, the conceptual model was essentially single individual oriented. When theorists became more interested in the manner in which patients made relationships with others and their internal representations, we moved to a much more two-person oriented model. The central point became the subject’s need to relate to the object. Object relations theory (Fairbairn 1952) has a different position therefore from classical instinct theory which is more interested in the subject’s discharge of instinctual tension. We know from object relations theory that our inner worlds are populated in a very real sense by many objects introjected from many relationships. The complexity and multi-dimensionality of this is astounding. Steiner famously quoted Rey as saying that clinicians working in the transference are always thinking of ‘what, in what state, does what, with what motive, to what object, in what state, with what consequences?’ (Steiner 1979).

From an object relations point of view, our inner worlds are populated with complex and multiply determined sets of relationships. However for the purposes of this exploration we might prioritise the main nurturing and early relationship which parents provide for children. In the adoption scenario this usual picture has been changed. For whatever reason, the birth parent is not providing the main sources of nurture. The adoptee begins with one set of parents but the care is handed over to another set of parents.

Earlier in this work, (Chapter 3) Brinich’s analysis was used to show how complicated the psychology of adoption was. Brinich (1990a, 1990b, 1995) suggested that ambivalence was central to *all* parent child relationships. He argued that the resolution

of the ambivalence could so easily be compromised when an alternative set of parents existed. Thus the adoptee would have an extra layer of psychological work to do in resolving ambivalence towards his own adoptive parents when in reality another set of parents existed i.e. birth parents. Similarly, the adoptive parents working with their ambivalence towards the adopted child would have another psychological task to accomplish when the fantasy of the child they did not conceive was always present.

This research has picked up much evidence that all of the adoption triangle members are constantly in psychological reference to each other. The *birth parents* are at some level constantly thinking about the child they relinquished and the adoptive parents who are now caring for them. *Adoptive parents* are constantly considering the inheritance of the birth parents and the manner in which the adopted child is negotiating nurture and nature. *Adoptees* are constantly scanning the adoptive parents for signs of abandonment and to the birth parents for similarities.

This theme will be explored in much more depth in chapter 10.

Adoptee#2 just wanted to let her birth mother know that she was alive and had been cared for by the adoptive mother. There was a sense in this narrative that the adoptee had been regularly preoccupied by her birth mother and what she might be worried about.

“Erm... ((pause)) and so I ...so in the end yes, I wrote to her, I wrote to her. And erm just said that I’d traced her and... and I wrote to her, it, it was almost I wanted to kind of let her know almo...it, it was more about from being, erm like, you know going and being a mother myself, going through it, having two children, it was, it was more that I felt a stronger sense that I wanted her to let up, I wanted to let her know that I was okay. ... That... rather than meeting her.

I felt as though I had a sense of duty to let her know that her child was, you know alive and well and healthy and...”

Birth#3 was overwhelmed with constant thoughts about her lost daughter. She was desperate for more contact and regularly flooded with feelings about the adoptive parents and her adopted daughter.

“...but the good news is that every year she sends me a Christmas card and er, she always puts in a little note of what’s happening to her and her children. Erm and some photographs so you know that’s great. It’s a very, it’s not much contact but it’s better than nothing. And I just have this hope that one day erm, she will want to meet me.”

Adoptive#2 fears the inevitable search by her child for his birth parent. Even though her adopted son is still very young, she often lets her thoughts go to the future when he might want to make contact with his birth mother. She worries about what that will do to her own relationship with him.

“Erm D (*her partner*) and I have talked about it a lot and we sometimes go out for a drink and talk a... you know we just talk about things like that and then I think it would be really, and I use those words, it would be terribly scary and hard, those are my key words aren’t they? Scary and hard. And you know of course it will be but I also think being the type of people we are, I mean we, we kind of expect that...at some point. I don’t know when but I mean, whether he’s 30 or 19, it will still feel the same, it will be like “ooh” you know does he love her, you know what I mean? All those things would come up, like Lx’s birth mother’s hundreds of years younger than me...you know so when I’m like 80 and hobbling about you know she’ll be like ((pause)) ... she’s only 18 now and I’m 49 so...I, I think, he, I think it would be...I, I think, you know I think we both expect it”.

2.

### Powerlessness

New Findings / Major Theme



Perhaps we all feel a little powerless in many of our relationships. Apart from the obvious external issues of, for example, employment hierarchy, gender etc, the complex dynamics of what we stand for in each other's inner world can take a very long time to tease out. Perhaps the triad members of adoption sense that the events of the adoption process are out of their control. For example the adoptee who feels the decision taken about them as an infant is powerless. It was taken when they were in a state of powerlessness. The birth mother may have felt that the prospect of caring for an infant was beyond her capacity and the power needed to be given away. The adoptive parent may have felt powerless in the face of the process of selection and vetting to become an adoptive parent.

In this research, the theme of feeling powerless is common. Again it is easy to see the roots of this. With the constant fantasy (and phantasy) of others in a triangular relationship, holding on to one's own agency might be compromised.

Adoptee#2 told a poignant story of finding her birth mother but being left with a sense of powerlessness when her mother had clearly forgotten her birthday. She wanted to be held in mind by her birth mother but she was just not capable of doing this. This adoptee couched her comments in terms of her birth mother's possible learning difficulties but the undercurrent was of a strong sense that she was powerless in the face of her birth mother's deficits.

"But...and she...one of the telling factors, when I fir...when I first spoke to her, the first time I spoke to her on the phone prior to the meeting, she said to me something like "oh it's my birthday next ..." she said something like "oh it's my birthday next week I'll be ..." erm, however old she was 60 or something and erm, then I, I mentioned something about my birthday and she said "when's your birthday?" And I thought my goodness there might...there's something maybe a bit wrong here. You know I thought either there's something ... or she's just put it to the back of her mind and she, you know she, she just can't ...I just thought what an odd thing, what a strange thing to say that she doesn't you know, this is her birth daughter speaking, she couldn't...

... recall the day I'd been born. So I suppose in a sense the kind of signs were there that something wasn't quite right erm"

Birth parent# 1 described her dialogue with her mother when she was a pregnant teenager. She did not think she could possibly challenge her own mother's insistence that she had the infant adopted.

"And I never questioned that. I never for a minute thought I could possibly keep her. It just never entered my mind you know. So I just, was very compliant and just went along with everything, just accepted that that's how it had to be. I think she might have kept the baby had we been... had more money. But that probably wouldn't have been a good thing either. Because I was in no fit state to be a parent at that age you know and my mum wasn't either really so I think it was the best thing for her that she was adopted."

Adoptive parent #3 relates the social worker's blunt assessment of her chances of getting the child she wanted. She was a competent and successful professional but felt powerless to have her own biological child or adopt an infant in the UK.

"And she said "you're too old, you'll never get a child". I was looking for a child under the age of three. She said "you'll never get a child under... all of those will be taken by young couples and you're white and they're aren't any white children like that anyway on the list" So you'd be out even if you were in, as it were" .

3.

"Secrets and lies"

New Findings / Major Theme

This theme borrows the title of the Mike Leigh film *Secrets and lies* (1996) about adoption. This film is a moving story of a working class birth mother who is traced by

her adopted black professional daughter. The scenes of searching and reunification are particularly painful as the birth mother gradually moves from denial to truth.

Again it was a strong theme from all corners of the adoption triangle in *this* research. The secrets were often attributed to societal mores. However perhaps psychologically the impact of adoption was too difficult to face honestly. Perhaps the truth of the fantasy, phantasy and/or reality of abandonment is too painful to bear. In this way, being secretive and dishonest might be a way of coping. The lies were often about desperation to search and make contact with those that had been lost.

Adoptee#1 described how his birth mother kept his existence a secret from her other children for decades. She had her first child adopted but went on to have at least two other children that she kept. Here this man describes how she casually lets his existence be known during a mild family row. The throwaway nature of the disclosure underlines the poignancy of the secret.

“And my mother ... my biological mother Axx... classic to her ...said ‘I’m really sorry about that Mx ... that you're not getting on with your brother... how would you like it if I told you had another one... you may get on better with him’ ... and then proceeded to talk on about the price of tomatoes or something! (*Joke.*) So... in actual fact this came as a massive bombshell to them. Far more than it did to me because a) I always knew I existed and b) I knew I was adopted ... they had absolutely no idea”.

Birth Parent#2 explicitly uses the term ‘secrets and lies’ often about her own experiences and adoption in general. She talks openly about how adoption and her story are riddled with secrets and lies. She had many episodes in psychotherapy but despite the protected nature of this relationship was not always even able to tell her therapists the whole story.

“...by the way I didn’t tell hardly, initially any of the analysts, even including A.W., all of this story because it wasn’t til I met other women whom I call my soul sisters, that I could really tell them the facts, even then there’s a hierarchy in some ways of badness, you know. Oh well at least you did.”

Adoptive Parent #3 spoke clearly about the secretive aspects of the foreign orphanage. She does not blame but has discovered that things are not what they seem.

“Because you could see the, the evidence of children but you couldn’t hear any. ... You will be in this room and this is the corridor to this room. And there was no erm, question at all of my seeing anywhere else. And I suppose on that first visit there was no reason why they would let me see it, because until I would say yes to a child they probably wouldn’t be that bothered about investing their time in it, because they’re all short staffed at these places. Um, so everything happened in this one room. And erm, my main feeling was I wonder what they’re hiding? I wonder if they’re slightly ashamed? I wonder if the children are ... the most extreme thought was I wonder if, I wonder if the children are kept locked up in rooms because they can’t look, haven’t got enough staff to look after them”.

1.

### Elements of chance.

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

In chapter 5 we saw how the novelist's skill and importance came from their ability to look at the world and dissect it in an imaginative manner. The creativity of the novelist could be focused on the manipulation of events and an exploration of the consequences. In the written word it was possible to include an elaborate inner world narrative of events that is not so clearly true in other art forms<sup>43</sup>. In particular the novelist often uses the element of chance to explore the 'what if' aspect of life. By mixing up the factors in an equation, the writer allows us to see a different kind of result. The story line of a novel allows the reader to see the elements of chance and its impact.

In many of the interviews for this research we saw the factor of chance play a huge role in the lives of people from the adoption triangle. It seems that *subjectively* the participants felt that their lives had been altered enormously by events that came about by chance.

Whether this was truer of the world of adoption than the world of non-adoption can probably never be fully ascertained. However it was clear again and again that many of the people in these adoption stories felt strongly that life events had changed based on simple luck and chance.

Adoptee#1 described how his adoptive grandmother had devised a 'test' to help her choose which child from the orphanage to adopt. By chance adoptee #1 picked up the ball his prospective adoptive grandmother threw for a group of orphans. This catch determined his future adoption.

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<sup>43</sup> It is however not unique to the written word. Screenwriters, playwrights and musicians have all contributed to creative analysis of the adoption process. For example in film Mike Leigh's 'Secrets and Lies', in music Joni Mitchell's song 'Little Green' is about her adopted child. Visual artists have also specifically addressed the loss in adoption. The artist Mary Husted (2010) is also a birth mother and recently exhibited her work which explicitly communicates many of the themes from adoption.

“They go up to this children's home, my grandmother buys a beach ball, she waits until the break period. Remember we were all ... there were hundreds of us. It being catholic ... We are not supposed to be born out of wedlock. All running around. So, she throws this beach ball in. I pick it up and take it to her. So she picked me! (Laughs.) Like, Lassie mate! I suppose it's no less arbitrary than, ‘I'll have the one with the blue eyes or whatever’.”

Birth parent#1 happened by chance to read a life-changing newspaper article about searching and wrote to the author of the piece. Before reading the piece she had no conception of searching and was resigned (in part) to not being in touch with her lost adopted child.

“...and then in 1989 erm, I saw an article in The Independent about erm a birth mother who had managed to contact her birth dau... her daughter and had had a reunion with her and I recognised the woman and erm, it just made me... I just wanted to touch it, I didn't know, I wanted to write to her, I didn't know what to say but I just wanted to touch her luck, you know something might help me somehow find my child. And erm, so I wrote to her and she didn't reply for a year and I was quite disappointed but a year later she phoned me...”

Adoptive parent #1 having given up on adoption, was seeking information on fostering when she was offered the very last place on a recently re-opened limited adoption list. The ‘fluke’ nature of the first step to adopting a number of children was a major part of this woman's story.

“...on a fluke I phoned up another town, because I'm in the middle between, to C. (town) and A. (town). So first of all I phoned C., the second time I phoned A. and just said “look I'm interested in long term fostering” thinking that again there's no hope of adopting. And they said um ((pause)) “why not adopt?” And I said “well I would love to but I didn't think that, that there would be any openings for couples”. She said “we've opened our books for five couples and you would be the fifth if you are deemed suitable”. So erm, so that was, that was wonderful and we went through the process”.

2.

Speed of relationship 'fit'

New Findings / Minor Theme

It proved a challenge to find terms for some of the themes. In the transcripts for this research there was a definite sense from all the triangle members that the relationships cast by the process of adoption *sometimes* moved quickly. Again clearly this is a complex process and some relationships evolve in a very slow manner. Piece by piece two human beings find enough over-laps in order to form something called a relationship.

However again and again in the transcripts for this research, there was evidence of relationships finding a fit in a very quick manner. The speed of this took the participants often by surprise. People who were not known for their impulsivity found themselves quickly in relationships they had assumed would take time to evolve. This finding is probably intrinsically linked with the earlier point about each of the triangle members being in some psychological relationship with the other two. Even though they may have never met face to face, they are regularly held in mind.

Adoptee#1 spent a long time earlier in this interview outlining an idea he had about hierarchies of relationships. It was a complex notion but essentially he felt that there were some people he would, for example, help in a minor way and there were some that were simply essential to his existence. He felt his internal hierarchy of relationships change instantly during the first face to face meeting with his birth family at an airport.

“Basically, these people, I had known then 30 seconds. And in absolute certainty, and almost in reverse of age as well, I knew, that here was this American party of nine, who had just hugged me. Exactly like hundreds of others in the same airport and I just realised that there wasn't anything I wouldn't do for him. You know. Including, you know, dying for the guy. And that was a very odd sensation to have that quickly. I'm not sure if that makes any sense?”

Birth parent #1 had a long slow build up to her reunion with her daughter. She searched and found but made only letter contact. It remained at that level for some years. When the daughter was ready they arranged to meet face to face. In this section Birth parent #1 describes how, at the first face to face meeting with her long lost daughter, there was an instant fit.

“And so I was there, obviously bright and early waiting on, I was waiting on the north side of the lion thinking she was coming from north because that’s where she lived. Unbeknownst to me she was waiting on the south side of the lion waiting for me from that side. And then, and then she stepped round the lion to take a picture of where we were due to meet and then we saw each other and then it was just incredible. And we just, we just hugged”.

Adoptive parent #3 was a successful professional when she felt compelled to adopt a child. She searched all over the world before finally finding one child in another country. She described the first look from the boy in the orphanage she was meeting for the first time and who would eventually be adopted by her. The speed of the ‘gear change’ from single woman to mother is encapsulated in this one quote from her transcript.

“And I heard the steps of a little child coming and it was ...I, I actually thought I’m not, I was so nervous, suddenly so nervous I thought ‘oh God this is it’ and in came this little boy who looked at me, and gave me a very long look and I gave him a long look and I was thinking, ‘oh God this is it’. This is er nappies erm, trips to the park, this is suddenly my life on a completely different track, just in that one look with that boy. And should I be doing this? Could I be doing this? If I’m going to do, not going to do this I’ve got to stop it you know as soon as I’ve finished in this room, my whole...it was a sort of blind panic really”.



3.

### Cash nexus

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

In our current version of a capitalist society, it could be argued that the cash nexus is the over-whelming manner in which we value things (Frosh 1987). It becomes part of our vocabulary for experiencing the external and internal world. The means of production is not simply or only about macro economics. It is an internalised aspect of the inner world. It is true to say that many place value in the non-material and spiritual side of life but it seems that the dominant hegemony is one in which the value of something is equal to its market value.

In such a complex and human process as adoption it would not be surprising that the discourse and the vocabulary of 'worth' (in the context of loss and abandonment) often uses the language of the cash nexus. It may also be true that the fantasies (and phantasies) of abandonment engender the idea of having been 'bought' (see chapter 4). This was certainly true for many of the narratives in this research.

Adoptee#1 told the story of his problematic relationship with his adoptive father. This interviewee knew that there were many levels to the tension between himself and his father. One of them included the cash he felt his father had paid to the authorities to adopt him.

"That ... also, I think he felt ... and I can totally understand this now, he paid a lot of money to get me out of the country. Because I worked it ... figured it out. In a country where you had to fill forms in in triplicate to go to the lavatory, right, you know. The little detective in me suddenly thought, hang on a minute, you know, they ... My grandmother, sort of, goes, sort of like, you know, chooses me in the March. Then my biological mother, like, took my photograph on my second birthday in the June. And by the September they've got me out of the country."

Birth parent#3 presented herself as a mainstream law abiding elderly woman but in talking about the process of adoption, became slightly paranoid. She was sure that money was at the heart of it. The institution of adoption was based on the rich families taking poor mother's babies.

"...when I talk to my peers you know, their babies were all given to these white, middle class couples, that seemed to have money, all they hadn't got was a child. They were barren." "But they, I don't know, I don't know why that happened but it seems to be the experience of my peers that their babies were given to such couples. Maybe they had the influence at the time. "

Adoptive parent #3 was driven to search for a child to adopt. She worked hard at her research and was well informed about inter country adoption. However even she was worried about the substantial link between the cash nexus and the adoption in R (*country*).

"It feels really strange. Erm, because they're all Government people, you're not, it doesn't seem to be bribing, they just don't seem to use the banks very much. There's a distrust of the banking system so you already feel very strange about the correlation between the money and the child, if you see what I mean, it felt sort of, it didn't feel right".

4.

#### Mismatch of internal and external.

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

Throughout this research process, there was an emerging theme of a mismatch between the internalised images one member had about the other in the adoption triangle and reality. Perhaps because of the essential truncated nature of adoption, the gradual evolution of the other can be very difficult. It lends itself easily to outdated versions internally whilst the external reality of the other has changed with time, experience and

maturity. For example, the adoptee may be so focused on the point of the removal from the birth parent that the parent remains static in the adoptee's mind. For example, the birth parent may be tormented by an image of the infant they gave up for adoption and not properly able to acknowledge its development into a child etc. For example the adoptive parents may be so full of the descriptions of the birth parents at the point of removal / abandonment that they are not able to grasp an idea of them being capable of maturing etc.

This is not just about lack of contact. There will be many fantasies (and phantasies) that will shape the internal versions.

Adoptee#1 had spoken a lot about the culture he was originally from and contrasted it with his middle class English upbringing. Prior to his searching he had an image of his birth mother being a little old lady in one particular country and the reality was very different.

“She said 'Oh yes, we've tracked down your biological mother'. Which erm...I thought, yes, fair enough. And...erm...and she lives in Fx. And I said, 'What Fx in America'? She said 'My dear, there is only the one'. I went, 'Oh' that really wasn't part of my plan whatsoever because my mental construct of this entire event was... You know...the little lady living in small remote B(*region*) village, may have made it to M(*major city*), maybe not. Oh no no! Flown across the Atlantic ...so all of a sudden there is this extra massive dynamic of ... which seems to run like a theme through my life. It's never in the country that you think it's going to be in. Nothing happened in S(*country*)”

Birth parent#1 was conscious of the chronological age of her adopted daughter. However, there were moments in the interview when it seemed that she had to force herself to imagine a mature woman when internally she still held a baby in her mind. She spent a long time talking about the infant that she put up for adoption actually now being an adult.

“And then when I began the search I had to face the fact, you’re not searching for a baby, you’re searching for an adult, a woman. Who’s had her whole...who’s had a lot of years of upbringing with other people.”

Adoptive parent #4 describes a situation in which the view of the birth mother of the child she adopted had to be radically altered. The mismatch of the reality of the birth mother and the adoption report description was striking. As more details of her adopted daughter’s foetal alcohol syndrome became clearer, the extent of the birth mother’s addiction to alcohol and the damage she caused her child became clear. The quote is not coherent but the tone of the communication was clear.

“And it seemed, that’s the way it kind of seemed, it’s always coming back to this thing, the pregnancy, drinking ... her baby, you know. And some of us, birth mother was an alcoholic, you know she...these campaigns that they’re putting together you know where it says, erm, you know stop drinking while you’re pregnant, yes some people can do that and I think that message needs to be out there but you, you know for a child to be as dramatically affected as Z, you have to be really drinking very, very heavily. Beyond what most people will do and eventually it, it killed, erm, you know it killed the poor woman, so you know I wouldn’t want to ((sighs)) I think it would be wrong for me to judge her.”

5.

### Knowledge

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

The aphorism ‘knowledge is power’ is too simplistic. To get facts about human relationships is important but there are many occasions when the inner world impacts the receipt and the delivery of knowledge. We know from the psychoanalytic work on learning and education that the relationship in which knowledge is transferred is crucially important (Salzberger-Wittenberg 1970, Youell 2006). Knowledge was an

important feature of these research adoption narrative transcripts. Many were aching for knowledge and many were desperate to give knowledge.

Adoptee#2 was desperate to know more about her birth. The tone of the description highlighted the frustration she felt at not being given clear and extensive knowledge from her adoptive mother.

“Erm.... ((pause)). I think the first sort of really strong conversa...sort of detailed conversation was erm, probably when I was about ...oh I don’t know 17 or 18 and erm, my mother gave me erm, a locket, a gold locket and a prayer book that had been, that my birth mother had sent, erm, sent with me, erm...and er really my, my erm, my adoptive mother didn’t, had very, very little history about circumstances, really didn’t know much at all.

Erm... ((pause)) so, I mean she just said, she just told ...I mean all along they’d always said “we went to a place and we chose you” you know you... there was always the sense that I’d been chosen...

... you know as opposed to they’d picked me and not...”

Birth#3 described how she had made contact with her daughter but she had not wanted to maintain contact with her mother. The birth mother was distraught and this manifested itself in many ways. One aspect of it was that she desperately wanted her daughter to know about the diabetes in the family. Her love of the child she had never physically cared for drove her to give information that would be in her best interests.

“...her father had diabetes from a very young age and I, I needed to warn her of this and when I first told her, she didn’t have it. But a few years later she wrote to me at Christmas time and said “I’ve been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and have to take insulin” so she’s got that from him. But I think you know from a health point of view, er I think these adopted children ought to know what’s in their genes. Er otherwise it’s you know it’s an unknown sort of sheet isn’t it? you’ve got nothing, you can’t tell your doctor what’s in the family history.”

Adoptive #1 described how her son was faced with his lack of knowledge during a medical examination. Painfully he 'wings' it but in the tone of the description the deep need 'to know' came through.

"...they were asking him questions and I was sitting there and it was 'any history in the family of' ... 'any history in your family of that' ... and um, I'd given J as much history that I know of but there's no major history that, that, that's in that family that's not in my family. ... it would be the genetic paternal side, grandfather and alcoholism but erm... that stuff you could find in any family and there's been no sign of asthma. So I think it, it ... that hit him a bit, that he... he was winging it and didn't know, didn't feel the need to say he was adopted, so therefore he didn't know but he was just looking at me and I was just nodding my head at things... that he said, and I said... and it was just asthma, well it was just any heart conditions, any ... just routine stuff that they ask"

6.

#### Meaning.

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

It is said that it is part of the human condition to see order in the world. Some might argue that this is the basis of many religious organisations. The random nature of the world needs to be tamed and there has to be some way of life making sense. From Daniel Stern's work (1985) we learnt that even the very young child has the capacity and the need to link events and stimuli together to form patterns. It is this integration and organization of experiences that forms the basis of what he calls the 'emergent self'. This very early and primitive need for meaning is different from simple knowledge of the facts. It is a way of making sense of the facts and the inter-relationships. In many of the narratives in this research this theme of wanting to see meaning in the adoption process leapt out.

Adoptee#2 described how she desperately wanted to know why she had been adopted. The meaning of the act was completely missing for her and was important for her own sense of self.

“...the second meeting was better, the second meeting was better but what she doesn’t seem to be able and willing to do in both those meetings is she hasn’t offered up any explanation or any ((pause)) for what reason I’m not sure, as to...she doesn’t seem to be either able or think she, or think that perhaps she has a duty to offer up any explanation as to why she put me up for adoption. So in a sense I’m still left sort of filling in the gaps a little bit”.

Birth Parent#1 in describing her search for her lost daughter, this birth parent talked about her constant scanning for meaning in the events surrounding her. She talks about the experience of a piano playing street artist saying bizarrely ‘five’ for no apparent reason.

“And so I’m always looking for these kind of connections so this is in my head, the number five, what could that be? There’s the fifth month, and so in the May a plant that’s never flowered flowers and it’s the fifth month and so... and this is when I get the first letter from my daughter. And so, all of these things I love them, they’re probably co-incidences but to me they are just really special you know and it just made it...”

Adoptive parent #2 talked about her life in comparison with the birth father of her child and the ‘meaning’ of the gap in their experiences. The quote is quite difficult to follow but the thrust of the point is that the adoptive mother was finding meaning in the experience of learning more about her son’s birth father.

“I feel ... ((pause)) I think it’s really sad. ((cries)) I think it’s sad to not have some compassion. For what people do in their life. I’m not perfect either, like, sort of, you know tomorrow’s a new day. And I appreciate Lx, I don’t know, if he was at ri, I think he was at risk, okay but ... it’s still really sad and how to help him through in later life.

They are his birth parents. *[Interviewer asks: "Can I get you a tissue?"]* Thank you. ((pause)) Sorry Robert. So rightly or wrongly I appreciate, yes there's no contact and I respect that and I, I know it would be very wrong if he had contact but it, you know... you're also ...I'm not a legal lawyer or a social worker or I didn't remove the children, I can on...I have to just sit with the sadness I have. I'll always have that, I could be in therapy for 100 years, it's, it is just ...sad....Very sad for human beings that their life goes wrong.

7.

### Loyalty

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

In the world of adoption many relationships are complex. As stated many times in this work, adoption rests on at least a triadic set of relationships after the first dyad (mother-infant) has in some way failed. In the psychoanalytic theory of development, achieving triangular relationships is a significant developmental point. Often the response to the triangular relationships is to feel that one must make a choice about which relationship to prioritise. In adoption, the sense is that one cannot have a relationship with both of the other two in the triangle and one must be chosen above the other. To relate to one of the triadic members of the triangle is to be disloyal to the other triadic member. There was evidence of this in the narratives for this research.

Adoptee#2 was very worried about her adoptive mother finding out that she had searched for her birth mother. The loyalty to her adoptive mother made her secretive when she searched for her birth mother.

"Um and I never mentioned I don't think I, I might have mentioned to a couple of close friends but certainly didn't mention to my birth mother or ...sorry adoptive. That is a very...it felt very private..... and it felt very erm, it was almost like erm, this might be a bit of a rocky road and who knows what it's going to..... throw up? And I wanted to, I suppose protect them from it as well...but also I felt it was much, it was just very private to me and sort of ...not really to do with anyone else. And I, and I also didn't



want to kind of take on... I think I felt that my mother (*adoptive*) would actually be quite hurt. And I certainly didn't want to do that. You know I wasn't prepared, there was no way that I wanted to go down that route erm... ((pause)) of upsetting her...mother or my siblings erm that I was going to start a search."

Birth parent#1 described the loyalty issues in her gradual reunion with her daughter. The daughter wanted to slow things down and discuss any contact with her birth mother with her adoptive parents.

"...she wanted to tell her parents first, she didn't want to make any contact with me until she had told her parents about it. That was what was going on behind the scene and then finally she wrote to me in May 19xx when she was 29."

Adoptive parent #2 was very frightened of her child growing up and choosing the birth mother. She projects into friends who suggest implicitly that it would be disloyal of her son to search for the birth parents. Her fear of this happening is palpable.

"I think it would be odd, you know I get people ... all the mum's at school go "oh you're such a great ..." "oh God he loves you, he'd never search" you know. I mean I don't know if that's like protecting me or just being a flippant comment but you know that's certainly not how Dx and I feel. I just think, I mean I, if I was adopted, I might, I don't know what I'd feel because I'm not but I can't imagine knowing my personality, I'm sure I'd want to make, meet. Even if I just met ...I don't know, my fantasy would be that I would. I, I, I can't imagine being 19 or 20 and not thinking, I would just like to have a meeting. But you know everyone is different and he would have to take the lead on that. I'd be petrified when that day comes. Petrified, because I'd just feel like "oh" but I'm petrified his first day at school. I'm always petrified. And I'm very emotional. And um ...but surely anyone would be, you know that your son or daughter is going off to meet their birth mom or dad. I mean that's a, that would be a big thing, but I'm very open to it, and, and ...goodness, I, I'd be amazed if my children didn't do that. Throughout their lives, it must be some time I would have thought. Or you know, we'll just have to wait and see. I don't know what the statistics are on, I don't have any

friends who are adopted, so I don't know ...erm, ((pause)) I don't have any experience of friends saying "oh I" I don't, don't really know. Unless it's stuff that I read or ...((sighs))"

8.

### Gratitude

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

If one sees adoption as a complex process that rests on the notion that a triad exists where a dyad usually exists, it make it less surprising that this research picked up themes of gratitude in the narratives. The Kleinian tradition defined gratitude as the mirror tendency of envy in that it was the innate urge to reach out and find the good object for nurture (Klein 1957). A related definition of gratitude is of it being the state in which we are thankful for the present state given the way things 'could have been'. Versions of this appeared often in these narratives of adoption.

Adoptee#2 feels grateful that she did not grow up with her birth mother. She refers to it as a 'lucky escape' and a 'close shave'.

"I think it has all stemmed from erm, you know I think part of the reason you know I feel as though I had a lucky escape and, and going into social work is I think something I felt right, had a bit of a close shave, things could have been very different and I want to, erm, be able to give something back. And I feel very strongly about kind of people's sense of duty".

Birth parent#1 feels grateful to the adoptive family for looking after her daughter and keeping her (the birth mother) in mind.

"...eventually I met her parents the following year. And then that was like coming full circle you know. And obviously it was a bit hard for both me and her parents but her

dad was lovely. Her dad erm, had told her in latter years, he said, when we took you, I was thinking about your mum that was left without you. He said it, he said it...he said it in a really nice and kind way. You know. And erm, she'd always known she was adopted and they'd always said they would help her trace if she wanted to do that you know so they were very open kind of people. And erm...you know I got on well with them. And X and I, my husband we used to go and visit them by ourselves you know without Nx, my daughter being there, we would just go and visit them and you know take them out for lunch, things like that so you know it was, it was really nice to have our own relationship with her parents as well as with Nx."

Adoptive parent # 4 speaks with gratitude about the impact on her of having her adopted child.

"But just the most tremendously positive and enriching and you know, it absolutely changed my life to adopt Zx. In extremely positive ways and ways that I didn't expect, you know that I found out things about myself, positive things ((laughs)) which is good ((laughs)) that I didn't know I was capable of."

9.

#### Rule breaking

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

This was an interestingly unexpected theme. It seemed that even though the interviewees were all respectable, educated and not at all delinquent, the narratives often contained the breaking of rules. Perhaps the primitive nature of the loss and the strength of some of the emotions involved, led many to breach the societal norms. Obedience to the guidelines for society to run smoothly pales into insignificance when faced with the deep and primitive psychological needs within adoption. This seems to be particular true when we consider the searching phenomenon in adoption.

Adoptee#2, despite data protection rules, managed to get secure and private Inland Revenue details of her birth mother quite soon after she began her search. This interviewee was a professional woman and was aware that she was breaking some serious laws even though she minimises it by referring to the act as ‘a bit naughty’.

“And from that I, I, it’s a bit naughty really I’ve got, I’ve got a friend that works for the Inland Revenue... and has a database for erm...the whole of the United Kingdom... and I said to him “look no hurry but can you just, when you’ve got a minute, in your lunch break, you know look up these names?” and er you know thinking that I probably wouldn’t hear back for weeks, but ten minutes later he rang back and said “well what do you want to know SXX? I’ve got full details of your birth mother, her name, her address, the name of her employer, her National Insurance number, what do you want to know? So, that, and that, that kind of threw me a little bit you know I, I ...sitting there thinking ‘Shit you know now I know I could you know ring her up, I could write to her, I could go and see, you know I could turn up on her doorstep.’ I, I found that sort of amount of information quite daunting. So I thought very sensibly, erm, don’t do anything with it.”

Birth parent#4 was prepared to pretend to be a customer just to see her daughter who was running a hotel. She observed her daughter for a weekend without disclosing her real identity. Again this professional woman was prepared to visit her daughter in cognito and spy on her unsuspecting daughter. At the time of the interview she had only very minor regrets about breaching the social rules of voyeurism.

“...this lady met me at the desk and she said, er, she said “oh you’re a bit early” she said “Kx usually checks people in” she said “but she’s actually upstairs washing her hair” so she said “I’ll show you to your room”. Kx being me daughter. And, and this lady being her adoptive mother. So I met her adoptive mother and really nice, really nice lady. And her father, her adoptive father actually carried our suitcases upstairs, so I met them, they were nice people.”

Adoptive #3 was prepared to 'bribe' officials to get the process complete. Perhaps in a different setting with a different task, this woman would have resisted the idea of breaking rules. However her need to adopt a child was driving her forwards.

"Um, and then he stayed in the room for a couple of hours while the orphanage director, through my translator asked questions. A little bit about me and then I was allowed to ask questions about him and I had a medical doctor with me, um from the local medical school at the university, I've paid her, everyone in R (*country*) gets paid in cash from the social services to everyone, you just take wodes of dosh with you."

10.

### Importance of siblings

#### New Findings / Minor Theme

The literature often refers to the triangle of adoptive parents, birth parents and adoptees but, as often mentioned in this work, it is a much more complex geometric shape than a simple three sided figure (see chapter 1). An interesting theme emerges from the narratives of this research to suggest that the siblings are psychologically very important (Hindle 2000a). We might surmise that the search for one's roots is also present in the comparison with siblings. Cross referring to siblings builds up a deeper picture of ourselves.

Adoptee#4 relates in detail a conversation between herself and her sister. She has spent lots of energy getting details of his birth family and discovers that her birth mother is dead. However she unexpectedly discovers that she has a sister and that this sister knows of her existence and her actual name. (Later this adoptee feels sure that her sibling had been secretly tracking her life.)

"So she said "if you just hang on I'll get her phone number for you". So I said "okay" thinking 'oh my goodness' you know. So she said "she's really nice, she won't mind you ringing her up" so I got this phone number and I rang and O---- answered. And I said to her erm, I said "are you O---- ?" so she said "yeah". I said "were you L--- M-----

, are you L--- M----'s daughter?" and she said "yeah" so I said "well, erm, I think we're related". So she said "oh are we love? Oh how are we related?" I said "oh I think I'm your sister". And she went "oh my God" ((laughs)) she said. She said, she said "you must be J----- then?" And it never dawned on me when she said that, that she knew me adopted name."

Birth parent #3 described the relationship between her adopted child who does not want contact and her sons who stayed with her. It was almost as if she felt pushed out by the estranged siblings needing to know each other. The tone of regret was strong in this section of the interview.

"I told her one Christmas that er, my elder boy was to become a father and she was thrilled with that. And she said "oh let me know when the baby's born" which I did and she sent a card, which was nice, and I have to say, in a way, she seems more interested in my sons than in me. "

Adoptive parent #1 described how sibling relationships were important to her. This was in the context of her having adopted the younger (full) brother of the first adopted child.

"...the same genetic parents had had, she was pregnant again, eight months pregnant again. And I had made this throw away remark to her (*The adoption social worker*) when we sort of finalised the adoption for Jxx that "oh you never know we might come back, you might see me back again". And she said was I interested in this other baby because the genetic parents said that they would quite like it to go to the same home that Jxx went to. So I was just delighted."

### Themes common to *two* members of the adoption triangle (Birth and Adoptee).

In this section (common to 2 members of the adoption triangle) there was only one theme of 'New Findings / Major':

1.

#### Second rejection more painful

##### New Findings / Major Theme

As noted many times in this work, loss permeates the adoption triangle. A striking finding from the interview material was that the 'second' rejection was very painful. There is the initial loss and then for at least two of the triad members (adoptee and birth) there is the potential for searching and reunion much later. If one party seeks and finds but the other is not willing or ready to respond, the loss can be catastrophic.

In some ways it is reminiscent of Murray's work (Murray, L. 1992) on the impact of depressed mothers on their infant. When the infant reaches out to the depressed mother but gets no response, the failure of reciprocity is devastating. The adoptee who searches and finds her birth mother but is then denied contact can feel the second rejection as more painful than the first. The birth mother who desperately wants a reunion with her adopted child but is refused is in torment.

Adoptee #3 told her story in an intriguing manner. Without fanfare or preparation, we hear quickly what the result of her search had been. She had used a searching agency and they had found the birth mother. However the mother did not want to have any contact with this adult adoptee. During the interview the interviewer recalled feeling shocked by the news. A follow up question was required to get to the meat of the point. During the second part of the interview this interviewee talked about 'going off the rails' as a result of this second rejection.

“Then, so I applied for my birth certificate which has, which was erm, what you could do, kind of er without anybody else’s intervention so I did that. I applied for my, er my full birth certificate. And then I went through an organisation called, they’re called Vyy now I don’t know what they were called then, but it was an organisation set up by the Vxx government to erm assist people like myself and birth relatives and I approached them to search for my birth mother and they found her and she didn’t want to know me and she didn’t want to have any contact with me. And so...so that’s where the story ends on that level.”

Birth parent #3 struggled with the loss of her infant when she was adopted but it is true to say that when she traced her as an adult, the rejection of face to face contact hurt just as much as the first loss.

“Erm, she did have lots and lots of questions. Erm, and I think I made a mistake really because I answered all those questions, I should, I feel, held something back, because the upshot was that in the end she decided she didn’t want a relationship and she didn’t want to meet me. Erm and I feel...if I’d only have held something back, maybe ((pause)) you know she would have said... “well I’ll meet you and perhaps we can talk about this”.”



Themes common to only *one* member of the adoption triangle (Adoptee).

In this section (common to 1 member of the adoption triangle) there was only one theme of Confirming / Minor.

1.

Family romance

Confirming / Minor Theme

In chapter three of this work the idea from Freud's 1909 paper 'Family Romances' was explored. In this he argues that latency aged children often had ideas about being a stepchild or adoptee. As the developmental challenge of gradual separation from the parents becomes more of the central task, the child begins to imagine that his parents are not his real parents but substitutes.

As noted many times in this work, there is an extra layer of psychological work needed by the adoptee (Brinich 1995). The existence of another set of parents makes the resolution of ambivalence more challenging. This was a finding from the interviews for this research but from adoptees only.

Adoptee#4 described how she and her friend used to have fantasies about their birth parents being royalty.

“And erm, strangely enough one of my playmates when I was a child, was adopted as well, J---. Erm and we used to sort of talk about adoption and you know how you sort of fantasize when you're a kid and it was “I might have been a princess or something” you know.” ((laughs))

Themes common to only *one* member of the adoption triangle (Adoptive).

In this section (common to 1 member of the adoption triangle) there were five themes in the Confirming / Minor category.

1.

Possessiveness

Confirming / Minor Theme

An interesting finding from the interviews was the theme of possessiveness. It seemed that the urge to care for the adopted child often triggered vocabulary in the narrative that sounded like the adoptive parents wanted to completely possess the child. Perhaps the primitive nature of wanting to have a child is over-stated in adoptive parents. Perhaps the leap-frogging into adoptive parenthood invites a form of ownership that is manifested differently from other forms of parenthood. Perhaps the unconscious dynamic of having ‘stolen’ another parent’s child is articulated in possessiveness.

Adoptive #1 described how after being introduced to the infant at the foster parent’s home for the very first time, she felt the strong desire to take the child. She strongly felt that the foster parent’s care was not good enough and he wanted to take ownership of the child.

“So we went and he was really quite sickly, terrible pallor, erm and the foster mother was, he weighed just under six pounds and she was giving him solids and I just thought, I’ve got to get this baby away from her.”

2.

Competition

Confirming / Minor Theme

One of the discoveries of this research was the feeling of being in competition for the children by the adoptive parents. The selection process for adoption is rightly rigorous. It is important that the adoptive parents are both considered to be good enough parents but also that they are 'matched' with the needs of the child (Dance et al 2010). There needs to be a fit between what the adoptive parents have to offer and the specific needs of the child. The dynamic of the selection process seems however to engender a sense of competition. The reading of the reports about the potential children often seemed to trigger thoughts of acting quickly to get the child before the other adoptive parents do. The fantasy (and phantasy) of legions of other adoptive parents competing for scarce children was strong in these interviews. Once they felt in some way connected to the child in the report, the anxiety about losing them arises.

Adoptive #4 spoke of how they read the reports of their child but had to wait until the adoption social worker returned to work to take it further. The key phrase is that they were concerned that the girl would be 'snapped up' by another set of potential adoptive parents.

"Erm, I mean at the time, erm, because we hadn't been approved, I was actually really worried that we wouldn't be able to adopt Zx, That she would be snapped up because she just looked like such a great kid. And erm, and so we spent a couple of, I spent a couple of weeks feeling mildly anxious about that...you know waiting for our social worker to come back from her holiday ((laughs)). Erm and then we just, after she did, we just you know, we started that process of erm, trying to secure Zx ((laughs)) really".

3.

### Gaining at the expense of others

#### Confirming / Minor Theme

The adoptive parent's narratives also presented an interesting theme of 'gaining at the expense of others'. It seemed that often the adoptive parent were preoccupied both with a position of 'owning' their child but at the same time being painfully aware of the birth

parent 'not owning'. The gain of having the child existed in parallel with a sense that it was at another's expense. This difficult state of mind was often presented with much sadness.

Adoptive parent #1 told a powerful and complicated story of her experience of adoption. She had adopted a child from a couple and then a few years later that same couple again put another child up for adoption. This adoptive mother also adopted this full sibling. In the time between the two adoptions, social work practice had changed and adopters were being invited to meet birth parents. This adoptive mother described her husband's deep ambivalence about the meeting. The couple did not want to face the idea of having taken a child away from another couple.

"But between J and C, they changed the rules, lowered the age and you had to agree to meet them if they wanted to meet you...whereas the year before that was never on the cards. So I, I said okay because you know I didn't want to do anything to jeopardise my ... but my husband said "no". He said "I view J as my child...and I don't want to see anybody else who ..." he just wasn't happy meeting them, he didn't want to think that he had taken a baby away from somebody or been made to feel uncomfortable about it, so he wouldn't go to the meeting, but that was fine, I went."

4.

#### 'Leap frogging'

#### Confirming / Minor Theme

This term is borrowed from a brief paper by Weir 2004 in which he describes the rapid move from being child-less to parenthood. He argues that the abrupt move from *not* having children to having children can cause a unique transitional difficulty. Human beings have a long period of gestation and immaturity. When adoptive families leap frog over this slow gradual process, there is an adjustment on many levels. Parents with children often talk about having to build on previous developmental stages to

understand the next one. Adoptive parents in this research spoke about the challenges of not having a complete step by step experience of caring for a child.

Adoptive #3 spoke eloquently of the impact on her of adopting a little boy and having to change her whole home. The description is explicitly about the practical changes to a home but one suspects that implicitly it was also about the emotional leap frogging into parenthood.

“So I basically, I took a punt and said yes and I went, then I had to wait, I came back here and I was here for about five weeks and then I went to get him. And erm, during that time I had to change my whole house round, put child locks on all the kitchen doors and I got someone in to put cupboards into my second bedroom and turn it into a nursery and there was loads and loads of practical things that completely stopped me thinking about any of the other stuff and I suppose that’s quite good in a way”.

5.

### Rescue

#### Confirming / Minor Theme

An emerging theme from the interview material was of a dynamic of ‘rescuing’. The communications were often ‘action’ oriented. The child was not getting what it needed and something must be done. The narratives often subtly implied that only the adoptive parent’s love could redeem the situation. The adoptive parents often felt that the infant or child needed to be taken into their care as soon as possible. They needed to be removed from less than optimal circumstances.

Adoptive parent #1 told a story of needing to rescue her adopted infant from the incompetent foster carer and then the medical profession who missed the proper diagnosis.

“...he was terribly sickly erm and screaming and he was eventually after lots and lots of visits erm diagnosed with a, with a stomach parasite called, oh Gar, or, got to be careful which one it is, Giardia you find it in the Middle East or India or those sort of places. But it took ((pause)) it took lots of visits to the doctor and lots of erm, I mean it, it was really hard because he was just screaming, if he was awake he was screaming. I knew he was in pain and nobody seemed to believe me.”

This chapter has presented the details of the thematic analysis of the twelve interviews undertaken for this research. The next chapter will move to hypothesis generation based on the 13 new findings.

## **Chapter Nine**

### Hypothesis generation.

#### Introduction.

This research evolved over many years. It eventually became an exploration of the applicability of psychoanalytic tools in understanding the many dynamics of adoption relationships in depth. The methodological problems of research in this area (lack of homogeneity, inter-subjectivity, presence of the past in the present) were well addressed by the inter and intra-personal dimensions of psychoanalysis. The adoption research literature seemed to concur (Wrobel and Neil 2009). The academics in this field of adoption research were moving away from simple outcome studies (Palacios and Brodzinsky 2005, 2010) to a much more elaborate and sensitive analysis of human beings in a process which included much loss. As the research concluded, the first part of the research question was answered. The good fit between psychoanalytic concepts and the challenges to fully understanding complex psychological dynamics in adoption became clearer.

The second part of the research question was focused on the manner in which novelists approach an understanding of adoption. This was a cross reference that had been very useful to investigate. With the writer's talent for exploring the inner world of characters in novels, they seem to offer an invaluable perspective. It was striking that fiction writers from quite different genres and eras had similar things to say about adoption. At the end of the process of this research the chosen novels did indeed provide a rich alternative perspective on adoption.

Finally, the phenomenon of 'searching' became a central part of the research question. As the research came to a conclusion, there was an omnipresence of reaching out within the adoption triangle that perhaps manifested itself in slightly different ways but was essentially true across the adoption triangle. (See appendix fifteen.)

This chapter will focus on developing and generating hypotheses. Using only the new findings from the transcripts, I will explore the possible reasons for the new data in more depth.

### The new findings and hypotheses *generation*.

It is important to reiterate the clear area of this research. Most of the adoption stories by the interviewees related to infant adoption not 'late placed' adoption. The latter often has quite different outcomes. (Rushton 2004, 2007 van IJzendoorn and Juffer 2006) This was not the result of any exclusion criteria written into the research. It was perhaps a consequence of the selection networks from which the interviewees were recruited. The hypothesis generated relate therefore only to infant adoption and not 'late placed' adoption<sup>44</sup>, fostering or 'special guardianship'<sup>45</sup>.

As outlined above, the research question matured over time and as the project evolved, the best methodology for gathering the data became clear. The analysis of the data also appeared organically from the research question and the methodology but not immediately. Various attempts were made to get as much as possible of the meaning of the data and gradually the final version of thematic data analysis emerged (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The material collected from the interviews about adoption soon confirmed much of the psychoanalytic understanding of adoption. There was a demonstrable 'fit' between many of the concepts and the transcripts. In that respect many of the findings were expected. However many of them were new findings. In total fifteen themes were new

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<sup>44</sup> As adoption practice changed to provide permanency for children in substitute care rather than providing infants for infertile couples, so older children were placed for adoption. The general consensus appears to be that after 12 months old it should be considered 'late placed adoption' (Howe 1998, Pace et al 2012 ).

<sup>45</sup> Special guardianship was only relatively recently created to add another option in substitute care (Adoption and Children Act 2002). If a court grants a Special Guardianship Order it allows a child to remain securely in a home with somebody who is not their parent and allows that adult to have parental responsibility. It does not however terminate the legal relationship with the birth parents and they remain parentally responsible. In short it is more secure than fostering but less than adoption.



findings (see appendix sixteen) and thirteen of them were evident across the whole adoption triangle.

I would now like to present some examples and hypotheses that may assist further analysis of these 13 themes. In order to strengthen the material, where relationships exist between the themes, I have clustered them together. The logic of the clustering is self evident.

Like all research into human psychology not all the themes were harmonious. Some findings appeared to be in contradiction or tension with others. Given that this research aimed specifically to generate hypotheses, I have elected to flush out this dissonance. Tidy answers to difficult questions were never expected. The field seems to be opening up to further subtlety and complexity rather than closing down into simple groupings. The inter-relationships between the contradictions will be explored.

### Triangular psychology.

This was a central and key finding of this research. The adoption literature in the main suggests that dyadically it is the *adoptees* and *birth parents* that are often preoccupied with each other. It is the focus of much of the academic writing (Feast and Philpot 2003, Howe and Feast 2000, Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle 2005<sup>46</sup>). The adopted children who grow up apart from their birth parents are interested in the lost parent. Similarly, the birth parents are interested in what has become of their lost children. The majority of novels dealing with adoption have focused on this particular dyad.

However, this research has picked up much evidence that *all* of the adoption triangle members are constantly in psychological triadic reference to each other. It manifests itself in slightly different ways but it is evident in all three parts of the adoption triangle. (See also chapter 3.)

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<sup>46</sup> These adoption researchers have written expertly about the searching process and present detailed explorations of, for example, who searches and why and when. However the emphasis is on the dyad of the adoptee and the birth parent. The intra-psycho search for the perfect adoptable child in the mind of the adoptive parent is often absent in their works.

In a way that is not true of non-adopted relationships, people in the adoption triangle were constantly in psychological reference to the other two in the triangle. There are of course triangular relationships in non-adoption, however the evidence from this research suggested adoption triangularity was different in quality. In short this research suggested that adoption engenders a particularly complex triangular psychology.

We know from psychoanalytic ideas about development that the growing infant begins life in a dyadic relationship with mother (Klein 1935). It is a significant achievement when maturity allows the child to consider mother having other relationships. In a fascinating way, the participants of the adoption triangle have not evolved and *developed* into a triangular psychology. They have been, in a sense, welded together by the adoption process. One tentative hypothesis might be that the enforced triangular adoption relationships lead to this preoccupation with the two others of the triad. There may be a qualitative difference to relationships formed by adoption that makes them essentially triangular. This hypothesis is more fully elaborated later in chapter eleven.

#### First Cluster of Themes: A need for a logical pattern

Powerlessness, Elements of chance and Cash nexus

Powerlessness

Again this research picked up across the triangle of adoption a sense of powerlessness. What are the possible reasons for this finding? The evidence of this work suggests that the triad members of adoption sense that the events of the adoption process are not entirely within their control. Again it exists across the adoption triangle but is communicated in slightly different ways by each of the triad.

In these interviews this theme of feeling powerless is common. Again it is possible to see the roots of this. With the constant fantasy and phantasy of others in a triangular relationship, holding on to one's own agency might be compromised. Being tuned into

essentially triadic relationships might reduce the sense that one has power over one's own destiny. The tentative hypothesis is therefore that the constant orientation to the others in the triad makes it difficult to feel empowered. Powerlessness was evident in Birth parent #3 story. She had searched and found her adopted daughter and was devastated when the daughter set very strict limits on the contact. Every day she ached for some kind of communication from her.

#### Elements of chance.

In *non-adoption* procreation there is an element of chance. We are still learning about the chemistry and physiology of the sperm's meeting with the ovum. The more we learn, the more we can see that there are uncertain and random (and possibly psychological) factors in this biological process. In many of the interviews for this research we saw the factor of chance play a huge role in the lives of people in all three corners of the adoption triangle. *Subjectively* the participants felt that their lives had been altered enormously by events that came about by chance. Adoptee #1 was in an orphanage when his prospective adoptive family came to choose a child. They did this by throwing a ball into a group of children. The child who brought it back to the family was chosen. Adoptee #1 has always felt that this element of chance was life-changing for him.

Whether this is truer of the world of adoption than the world of non-adoption can probably never be fully ascertained. However it is clear again and again that many of the people in these adoption stories felt strongly that life events had changed based on simple luck and chance.

What tentative hypothesis can we generate to explain this unexpected finding? The idea that chance played a huge role in forming the relationships in adoption is perhaps inter-related to the notion of triangular psychology. Each triad member may feel that he/she was dependent on the actions of the other two. In this way they feel that chance has played a disproportionate role in shaping their lives.

## Cash nexus

Capitalism and the cash nexus could be said to be represented both externally and internally. It becomes part of our vocabulary for experiencing the external and internal world. The means of production is not simply or only about macro economics. It is an internalised aspect of the inner world. It is true to say that many place value in the non-material and spiritual side of life but the dominant hegemony is one in which the value of something is equal to its market price. In such a complex and human process as adoption it would not be surprising that the discourse and the vocabulary of 'worth' (in the context of loss and abandonment) often uses the language of the cash nexus. It may also be true that the fantasies and phantasies of abandonment engender the idea of having been 'bought' (see chapter 4). Perhaps the subjective feeling of being removed lends itself to a conscious or unconscious wish for it to have been to somebody's advantage. This was certainly true for many of the narratives in this research. They often made references to the cash nexus whilst talking about the adoption process.

A tentative hypothesis for this unexpected finding might be about the need to have a coherent narrative for the primitive losses involved in adoption. In this society, loss can often be transposed to the ubiquitous language and model of the cash nexus. We express our internal losses using the language of the external market system known as capitalism. Another tentative hypothesis is that the triad member's perception that the adoption process has not been naturally created but purloined. The unconscious feeling is of the cash nexus driving the altered states. Profit and loss that is inherent in the capitalist system becomes the vocabulary for internal states.

This first cluster of themes entitled 'A need for a logical pattern' including 'powerlessness', 'elements of chance' and 'cash nexus' are over-lapping on the human need for a pattern. From Daniel Stern's work (1985) linking developmental psychology research and psychoanalysis, we learnt that even very young child have the capacity and the need to link events and stimuli together to form patterns. It is this integration and organization of experiences that forms the basis of what he calls the 'emergent self'. In this research, some have explored this need for patterns in terms of their lack of power, some have placed it with luck and some have envisioned the invisible hand of the market to see a pattern that would explain the adoption.

## Second Cluster of Themes: Suspended truth

### “Secrets and Lies” and Rule Breaking

#### “Secrets and lies”

This new finding was a strong theme from all corners of the adoption triangle in this research. The secrets were often attributed to societal mores. It is certainly true that the statistical peak for adoption in the UK (1969<sup>47</sup>) coincided with the start of a fundamental change in society. Challenges were being made to previously accepted values about single parenthood and sex before marriage. Some social commentators argue that although London was in the midst of the ‘permissive society’ and was ‘swinging’, the rest of the UK was not (Sandbrook 2006). Even at this time single parenthood could lead to strong social disapproval and adoption across most Western societies. Outside certain parts of UK metropolis, illegitimacy tended to be kept secret.

From an inner world perspective we might say that psychologically the impact of adoption is too difficult to face honestly. Perhaps the truth of the fantasy, phantasy and/or *reality* of abandonment is too painful to bear. In this way, being secretive and dishonest is a way of coping. The lies were often about a feeling of desperation to search and make contact with those that had been lost. The generated hypothesis is therefore that the secrets and lies are the result of the fantasy and phantasy about loss and abandonment.

#### Rule breaking

This was an interestingly new finding across all three areas of adoption. It seemed that even though the interviewees were all respectable, educated and not at all delinquent, the narratives often contained the breaking of rules. Some of the breaches were of the

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<sup>47</sup> The DoH recorded nearly 27,000 adoptions in 1969.

etiquette for normal social behaviour in particular settings. Others, however were actual law breaking. Adoptee #2 used a contact to get confidential information about her birth mother from a governmental data bank.

The primitive nature of the loss and the strength of some of the emotions involved, led many to breach the societal norms. In sociological terms (Structural functionalist - Talcott Parsons 1975) obedience to the guidelines for society to run smoothly pales into insignificance when faced with the deep and primitive psychological needs within adoption. This seems to be particularly true when we consider the searching phenomenon in adoption.

The hypothesis for this cluster of new findings is therefore related to the power of the emotional reaction to adoption in all three triad members. Primitive forces are at play and so moving away from social norms and breaking rules becomes much less daunting even for well socialised adoption players.

### Third Cluster of Themes: The epistemophilia of the adoption triangle.

#### Knowledge and Meaning

##### Knowledge

One of the new findings in this research was a complex need for knowledge across the adoption triangle. To get facts about human relationships is important but there are many occasions when the inner world impacts the receipt and the delivery of knowledge. We know from the psychoanalytic work on learning and education that the relationship in which knowledge is transferred is crucially important (Emanuel, L, 2005, Salzberger-Wittenberg 1970, Youell 2006). Knowledge was an important feature of these research transcripts. Many were aching for knowledge and many were desperate to give knowledge. Many were in such states of mind that giving and receiving knowledge was a much more complex process than normal. The nature of the relationships through which it would be handed over was not simple.

Again the tentative hypothesis to explain this finding might be related to the triangular nature of adoption. In the non-adopted dyadic relationships there would be potential for a free exchange of data at the time of the need for knowledge. In the triadic relationship that is adoption, the knowledge might never come or might not arrive at the right developmental point<sup>48</sup>. The triadic nature of adoption shapes the form, process and quality of knowledge.

## Meaning

A desire for meaning was another new finding across the triad in the transcripts for this research. Reaching out for meaning in narratives that contained very few facts was a powerful communication. It is said to be part of the human condition to see order in the world. The random nature of the world needs to be tamed and there has to be some way of life making sense. Again Daniel Stern's work (1985) seems relevant here. The early infant's capacity and the need to link events and stimuli together to form patterns are crucial to development. This primitive need for meaning is different from simple knowledge of the facts. It is a way of making sense of the facts and the inter-relationships. In many of the narratives in this research this theme of wanting to see meaning in the adoption process leapt out.

A tentative hypothesis for this finding takes us to ideas about the essential need to make sense of a random world. Perhaps the 'nameless dread' (Bion 1962a) of uncontained and meaningless experiences drives us towards wanting meaning and this is particularly true in a world of loss and truncated dyadic relationships. The terror of having nothing that makes sense of the loss is too much to bear.

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<sup>48</sup> Brodzinsky (2011) has written about the importance of giving developmental correct information to adoptees about their adoption throughout their childhood.

### Themes in tension or contradiction:

Speed of relationship fit, Mismatch internal and reality and Gratitude.

Speed of relationship fit.

In the transcripts for this research, there was evidence of relationships finding a fit in a very quick manner. Interviewees talked about the moment in time when they felt everything change about their relationships internally and externally. The speed of this often took the participants by surprise. People who were not known for their impulsivity or disinhibition found themselves quickly in relationships they had assumed would take time to evolve. Adoptee #1 eloquently described the lightening quick change of the hierarchy of his intimate relationships when he met his birth family in a reunion.

This finding is probably intrinsically linked with the central point about each of the triangle members being in some psychological relationship with the other two. Even though they may have never met face to face, they are regularly held in mind. In terms of hypothesis generation, we might argue that the triad members are all so caught up in thinking about each other at a significantly deep level that the relationship forms in a much quicker manner than it would in normal circumstances.

Mismatch internal and reality

Throughout this research process, there was an emerging theme of a mismatch between the internalised images one member had about the others in the adoption triangle and reality. Perhaps because of the essentially truncated nature of adoption, the gradual evolution of the other in one's mind can be very difficult. It lends itself easily to outdated versions internally whilst the external reality of the other has changed with time, experience and maturity.

This is not just about lack of contact in reality. There will be many fantasies and phantasies that will shape the internal versions. This finding might lead us to explore



the manner in which the inner world is populated when each of the participants of the adoption triangle are so intertwined with the other two. Again it is a corollary of the triangular psychology. The tentative hypothesis for this finding is therefore that the truncated and triangular relationships in adoption facilitate the mismatch between the internal and external reality of each of the others in the adoption triangle.

## Gratitude

Gratitude was a new finding discovered by the interviews in this research across the adoption triangle. If one sees adoption as a complex process that rests on the notion that a triad exists where a dyad usually exists, it make it less surprising that this research picked up themes of gratitude in the narratives. The Kleinian tradition defined gratitude as the mirror tendency of envy in that it was the innate urge to reach out and find the good object for nurture (Klein 1957). A related definition of gratitude is of it being the state in which we are thankful for the present condition given the way things ‘could have been’. Versions of gratitude appeared often in these narratives of adoption.

The hypothesis generated by this finding is perhaps the mirror image of the also existing themes of loss. This runs in parallel to the notions of deprivation and is about what has been gained from the triangular relationships that are at the heart of adoption. Listening carefully, using the model of interviewing that assumes a ‘defended subject’ (see chapter two) allows for this contradictory finding to emerge and stand importantly alongside other apparently opposite feelings.

These three themes which appear to be in tension with each other (Speed of relationship fit, Mismatch internal and reality, Gratitude) are intriguing. How can there be a theme that has adoption-made relationships quickly clicking into place *and* a theme about a tension between the internalised image and the external reality? Surely they are in contradiction. Similarly, how can there be a theme about being grateful for the state of adoption with its truncated relationships? I suggest this is the value of using a psychoanalytic perspective on adoption. It is this view of humanity that allows for tension between competing parts of the inner world. Psychoanalysis is well suited to resting in this kind of uncertainty. ‘Living in the question’ as Keats (1817) put it has

been a part of Psychoanalysis since its inception. This research has not found all the answers. Indeed it has clearly flushed out the reality of the human life of contradiction in the adoption triangle.

### Discrete Themes:

#### Loyalty and Importance of siblings

##### Loyalty

A theme of loyalty sprang out of the interviews for all three triad members for this research. This was slightly unexpected. In the world of adoption many relationships are complex. As stated many times in this work, adoption rests on at least a triadic set of relationships after the first dyad (mother-infant) has in some way failed. In the psychoanalytic theory of development, achieving triangular relationships is a significant developmental point. Often the response to the triangular relationships is to feel that one must make a choice about which relationship to prioritise. Oedipal resolution is the first of these developmental points. I will explore this in more depth in chapter eleven.

There was evidence from the interviews that participants often felt that one cannot have a relationship with both of the other two in the triangle and one must be chosen above the other. To relate to one of the triadic members of the triangle is to be disloyal to the other triadic member. Birth parent #1 was very clear that her daughter wanted to have her adoptive parents on board before any forward step in reunion with her birth mother. Birth parent #1 found this loyalty frustrating but endearing

The hypothesis generated by this unexpected finding might again be related to the triangular relationships in adoption. It is about the impact of having two sets of people to consider when the non-adopted world often only has one. Before relating to one set of relationships, the other needs to be considered.

## Importance of siblings

The literature often refers to the triangle of adoptive parents, birth parents and adoptees but, as often mentioned in this work, it is a much more complex geometric shape than a simple three sided figure (see chapter 1). An interesting theme emerges from the narratives of this research to suggest that the siblings are psychologically very important (Hindle 2000a, Ludvigsen and Parnham 2004). We might surmise that the search for one's roots is not only about parents and children. It is also present in the comparison with siblings. Which family has not joked about some siblings inheriting a particular family trait in a particular form? Cross referring to siblings builds up a deeper picture of ourselves.

Generating hypotheses for this unexpected finding takes us to the nature of family relationships. It is not only about parent-child relationships. Family life is about inner worlds, fantasies and phantasies but it is also about the spaces between each of the family members. By maintaining relationships with siblings we enrich ourselves and compare and contrast potentials and capacities.

## Final thoughts

In a fascinating way, the many themes that were identified in the interviews were also present in the two novels chosen for this research. In chapter ten I have described the themes of adoption that Ondaatje and Dickens have outlined that overlap with the interview transcripts. These writers observe many of the themes that the thematic analysis of the interviews found.

Chapter eleven will explore in more depth the central finding and spine of this research. This chapter has distilled the huge amount of data contained in the 12 interviews into just 13 new themes across the adoption triangle. The inter-relationships and contradictions of the 13 themes were fascinating and intriguing. Many researchers in adoption now want the findings of research to assist rather than just list (Wrobel and Neil 2009) The possible impact on clinical practice will be one of the aims of the chapter eleven.

## **Chapter ten**

### Interview analysis cross referenced with the two chosen novels

In chapter eight, I showed that the close thematic analysis of the transcripts of the interviews of adoptees, birth and adoptive parents contained many rich communications about the inner world reaction to adoption. The narratives of the 12 people across the adoption triangle contained difficult features of human relationships. The ‘defended subject’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) when listened to very closely, illuminated some features of life which confirmed the main theories in the adoption literature but also some that were unexpected.

It was also true that many of the broad themes from the 12 transcripts were *also* present in the two pieces of fiction chosen for analysis and cross reference for this research. The argument presented in chapter 1 and chapter 5 of this research was that the fiction writer had always been fascinated by adoption (Brinich 1990a, Howe 2009). It presented authors with an intriguing set of colours with which to paint. Without the technical language and tools of psychoanalysis many writers seem to be able to explore the inner world with clarity and precision. Many writers of fiction illuminate the central themes of adoption and are often entirely congruent with psychoanalytic ideas.

To test this assertion out as far as possible, the choice of books was made deliberately wide. If there was a similar theme in contrasting and very different literary genres it would make the argument stronger. The comparison was between a classic writer from the 19<sup>th</sup> century who wrote novels in episodic form and apparently with a view to changing society and a 21<sup>st</sup> century novelist who experiments with new forms of writing that dismantles the usual structures of the novel. Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* was compared to Michael Ondaatje’s novel *Divisadero*. The former was a linear story teller and the latter revels in being oblique and “militantly opposed to western habits of narrative” (McCrum, 2011).

The results of the close thematic analysis of the transcripts from the interviews overlapped with many of the themes from both writers. They were *not* all present.

I will present the themes that were found in the transcripts *and* the novels. In the same way that quotes were used to evidence the existence of the themes in the interview transcripts, quotes from the novels will also be presented to show the overlap in appendix 20. Only one quote from each book will be used to make the piece digestible.

Clearly the 12 narratives were captured in a single question interview format designed to learn more about adoption. The novels are, in one sense, completely different from the interviews in that they are the creation of the two writers and exist for a multitude of reasons not all directly related to adoption. I present them here firstly to support my argument that the writer of fiction has much to say about the inner world and in particular these novels have a great deal that is important about the adoption process. Secondly the overlap of the novels and the narratives suggest that novelists are able to illuminate the central themes of adoption.

To assist the reader, appendix seventeen contains the names of the characters, in which book they appear and their relationships. (The synopsis of Bleak House is appendix 6 and the synopsis of Divisadero is appendix 9.)

1.

### Loss and mourning

Bleak House.

This expected theme of loss and mourning was omnipresent in the interviews for this research. In Bleak House, the birth mother, Lady Dedlock, having thought that her adopted child was dead, discovers that she is still alive. Dickens has written her character as a woman ‘bored to death’ and secretly struggling to mourn the loss of her child and first lover. The aristocratic woman who had repressed her feelings about her child is suddenly in touch with the loss in a completely different manner.

Divisadero

Themes of loss and mourning are present throughout the book Divisadero. Anna reflects on her adopted siblings (Claire and Coop) and on her own dead birth mother that she cannot recall. In one section she refers to a book that was a transcript of an interview the

mother had taken part in long before her death and also by her older adoptive brother. Claire's dead birth mother is referred to as a ghost in much the same way that Lifton refers to the ghost kingdom of adoption (Lifton 2010).

2.

### Incomplete

Bleak House.

The interviewees for this research often talked about a feeling of being 'incomplete'. In Bleak House, the adoptee Richard Carstone describes himself and his inability to get his career going. He feels something is missing. The highly observant Dickens is commenting on the adoptees' sense of incompleteness.

Divisadero

In Divisadero the adoptee Claire describes her feeling of incompleteness in response to a question from her employer and friend. She is referring to her way of compartmentalising her life in an effort to contain it but that this strategy does not work. Not knowing anything about her dead birth mother, the loss of her adoptive mother and the unavailability of her adoptive father left Claire feeling incomplete.

3

### Physical Similarity

Bleak House.

As expected the theme of looking for physical similarity was found in the interviews for this research. Charles Dickens addresses the theme of physical similarity in adoption in many ways in Bleak House. In one part a character is teasingly close to making the link between the birth mother Lady Dedlock and the adoptee Esther Summerson. The physical similarity between the mother and the child is striking. It is very important to both of the characters and the story line but it is also a description of this phenomenon in the adoption triangle in general. When Mr Guppy sees the portrait of Lady Dedlock

in Chesney Wold he feels that he has seen it before. He is so close to making the association between the physical similarity of the birth mother and the adoptee.

Divisadero.

In this novel Ondaatje explores, in his usual oblique manner, the importance of physical similarities between the siblings in the Mendez family. He relates a number of occasions when Claire and Anna are mistaken for each other and this twin like quality is one of the dimensions that the author uses to explore the importance of physical similarity in adoption.

4.

#### Guilt

Bleak House.

Dickens observes and describes the theme of guilt in the adoptee. It is not an uncommon feature that the adopted child believes that she/he caused the adoption in some way. Many of the narratives of adoption express strong feelings of guilt. As a child, the adoptee Esther tells us about her deepest feelings of being at fault whilst she has long important conversations with Dolly (her transitional object).

5.

#### Mental health issues

Bleak House

In the stories from the interviews from this research, there were many references to mental health issues both personally and in others. Dickens caught something of the concern with mental health issues in the adoption triangle in his characterisation of the adoptee Richard Carstone. From the 21<sup>st</sup> century psychiatric nomenclature, we might suspect that he was writing about bipolar depression in his description of Richard's oscillation from euphoria to depression.

Divisadero.

In Divisadero Ondaatje often alludes to the mental health problems of the adoptee Coop in terms of trauma, his lack of contact with others and his troubled relationship with himself.

6.

### Searching

Bleak House.

Searching was a part of all the narratives of adoption collected by interview for this research. The metaphor for searching in Bleak House appears over a number of chapters. The clearest is in a long section in which the birth mother and the adoptee following a brief re-union, are desperately searching for each other between London and St. Albans. The birth mother desperately wants to find her adopted daughter to say goodbye. The adopted daughter wants to find her to stop her suicide. The searching for the birth parent becomes dream like. In Esther's voice it becomes a psychological journey in which houses take on human shapes and water-gates open and close in her mind. In this way Dickens is able to capture the primitive nature of the searching.

Divisadero.

The adoptee Claire manifests searching in Divisadero in firstly her choice of profession (a researcher for the courts) and secondly in her hobby of solo horse riding in the dangerous mountains. It stands as a metaphor for the searching inherent in adoption processes.

7.

### Identity

Bleak House.

Identity formation was a strong theme in the interviews undertaken for this research. At the start of Bleak House, Dickens uses the voice of Esther to suggest that her identity is still quite confused. Her godmother / aunt has given her no information about her roots.



Her adoptive father is slow to tell her the little he knows. In addition he develops many nicknames for Esther. Using terms from popular songs and myths etc, he calls her by many endearing titles. Being a 'good girl' Esther responds to all of the names. However she later speaks of herself as being lost as a result:

Divisadero.

The adoptee Claire's history is unknown to her and she ponders her identity. She has no information about her birth mother from her reticent adoptive father. She considers what came together to make her such a skilled horse woman

8.

#### Life Cycle Events, Loss and the timing of search

Bleak House.

In the narratives from the interviews for this research, the timing of the search for others in the triangle was a strong recurring theme. Often there was a life cycle event that triggered the reaching out to search for the lost relationship. For example, the adoptee's experience of childbirth often led directly to searching for the birth mother. In Bleak House, there are examples of successful reunions in the character of Mr George and his estranged mother Mrs Rouncewell. However, by painful contrast, the search and reunion of adoptee Esther and birth mother Lady Dedlock is not so clear cut. Lady Dedlock discovers the facts of her child having been adopted at the same time as Esther is infected by smallpox. Faced with the possible death (life cycle event) of her child, she risks everything to reach out and meet Esther. Her loyalty to her aristocratic husband prevents her from making this reunion anything other than a single event.

9.

#### Anger

Bleak House.

The research interviewees often spoke about feelings of anger in themselves or others in the adoption triangle. The adoptee Richard becomes gradually angry with his adoptive

father in Bleak House. Dickens elaborated the story of Richard slowly throughout the long novel. At first he is presented to the reader as a ‘handsome youth, with an ingenuous face and a most engaging laugh’. By the end of the novel he is clearly suffering from some mental health difficulty. His anger towards the adoptive father manifests itself in a row over the law suit that names Richard as one of many possible beneficiaries of a much contested will. Dickens is capturing the theme of anger that is often observed in the adoption triangle.

Divisadero.

Ondaatje has a talent for capturing an idea in a brief phrase. He uses his skills as a poet to say many things with just a few lines. In this quote one of his daughters are commenting on his anger at losing his wife in childbirth. The grieving father takes not only his own daughter Anna home from the hospital, but also adopts Claire. This infant’s mother has also died in childbirth and she has no other family to care for her.

10.

### Replacement

Bleak House.

Replacement themes were apparent in the material from the interviews for this research. For example, faced with the loss of a child through relinquishment for adoption, many birth mothers went on to have and keep a ‘replacement’ child. Dickens also tackles this theme. At the end of Bleak House, John Jarndyce has facilitated Esther’s marriage to Allan Woodcourt and provided them with another version of Bleak House in the North of England. Richard has died and Ada has given birth to his son. Jarndyce, never very good at working through, replaces his losses by taking Ada and her infant son back to the original Bleak House. The cycle begins again? Jarndyce invites Ada back to the original Bleak House.

Divisadero.

In Divisadero the farmer Mr Mendez experienced his wife die giving birth to their daughter Anna. In his grief and loss, he simply takes another child whose mother has

also died giving birth. The sense of Claire as a replacement for the dead wife is strong throughout this story.

11.

### Difference

Bleak House.

The interviews for this research found a theme of subjectively feeling 'different' from others. In Bleak House Dickens writes of the adoptee Esther feeling different from the rest of the world. Her godmother /aunt did not assist the adoptee to explore and understand her relationships and in this way colluded with this adoptee's sense of being different.

Divisadero.

The adoptee in Divisadero called Coop is painted by Ondaatje as constantly feeling different from his adoptive family. The farming family is stable and regular whilst Coop craves high states of excitement and danger. Ondaatje is leading the reader to consider the many versions of Coop's subjective sense of difference.

12

### Triangular psychology.

Bleak House.

The adoptee Esther struggled to get knowledge from her godmother / aunt and to a lesser extent from her adoptive father Jarndyce. Dickens is able to show that she was often in a state of preoccupation about the others in the adoption triangle. This was also a common theme in the interviews for this research. Each member of the adoption triangle held the other two members in mind significantly. In Bleak House, Esther now knows who her birth mother is but is struggling with the agreement that they should never again meet. Dickens captures the agony of this state well.

Divisadero.

Ondaatje captures the sense of all the triad members of the adoption process being in psychological reference to each other. In one scene the adoptee Claire is caring for her adoptive brother who has had neurological damage from a beating. Claire desperately wants to reunite him with their adoptive father whilst making links with three sets of birth parents.

13

### Powerlessness

Bleak House.

In the interviews for this research, the theme of feeling powerless was often apparent in the material. For example, the birth mother who felt powerless in the face of her adult daughter's refusal to enter into anything other than letter exchange. Power is in the hand of another. There are echoes of this in Bleak House as Dickens paints the haughty and aloof character of Lady Dedlock. "My Lady Dedlock, having conquered her world, fell, not into melting, but rather into the freezing mood". However, her control is almost completely removed when the sadistic lawyer Tulkinghorn discovers her secret. He toys with her about when he will disclose this fact to her husband and society.

Divisadero.

Ondaatje explores the theme of powerlessness in Divisadero as he describes the relationship between the adoptee Coop and his adoptive father Mr Mendez. The latter seems to treat his adopted son as farm labour and Coop responds with resignation. Perhaps he feels that he is powerless as a 'rescued' orphan. When Mr Mendez discovers the sexual relationship between his daughter and Coop, he violently attacks the young man. The author communicates the powerlessness of Coop in his lack of retaliation during the attack.

14.

### 'Secrets and lies'

Bleak House.

The interviewees for this research often spoke about secrets and lies in the adoption process. Dickens also illuminates this phenomenon in *Bleak House*. The adoptee, Esther is never told the truth about her birth mother as a child. She grows up with her maternal aunt who tells her that she is her godmother. The truth of their blood relationship only comes out when a solicitor visits after the aunt / godmother dies.

Divisadero.

The exploration of the secrecy that can appear in adoption was explored by Ondaatje in the characters of Mr Mendez and his adopted daughter Claire. Two of the children in the family had disappeared and Mr Mendez had no emotional vocabulary to discuss this. The loss of his wife and his attempt to replace her via the adoption of Claire made him prone to secrets and lies. When Claire brings the subject of the past up, he simply wants to sweep the issue under the carpet.

15.

#### Elements of chance

*Bleak House*.

Throughout the interviews there were references to luck and chance. The interviewees subjectively felt that their lives had been altered by a random act. *Bleak House* is a complex and long novel and like life contains many coincidences. Perhaps the main one is the chance discovery by Lady Dedlock of a piece of writing in the possession of her family solicitor Tulkinghorn. It is the distinctive handwriting of her ex-lover and father of her secret child. This discovery sets in train a whole series of events that leads to searching and reunification with her lost child. Dickens is exploring the theme of luck and chance that many in the interviews also felt.

Divisadero.

In *Divisadero*, the character of Coop has a reckless sense of adventure. His main driver is high material gain which Ondaatje links with his experience that life as an adoptee is based on luck and chance. Ondaatje's creation of the adoptee Coop is similar to many of the interviewees stories about elements of chance in their lives.

16.

Speed of relationship fit.

Bleak House.

An unexpected finding of this research was that many of the interviewees felt that their adoption relationships had developed in speed. It may be that the observant Dickens could also see that in adoption, relationships can move quickly and take the participants by surprise. When Esther, the adoptee, meets up with Lady Dedlock, her birth mother, things move rapidly. The aristocratic and aloof Lady Dedlock is suddenly embracing Esther and expressing her powerful feelings for her daughter.

17.

Cash nexus

Bleak House.

There was an unexpected theme in the interviews of the adoptees, birth and adoptive parents for this research that referred to a cash nexus. For example, some of the birth parents felt that adoption had been carried out on behalf of the rich and that cash had been involved. Dickens also plays with this idea in the adoption triangle. He is interested in the often unstated reasons for behaviour. In Bleak House he tracks the changes in Richard from trusting his adoptive parent to being highly suspicious of him. At one point he comes very close to saying that the whole adoption relationship was based on Jarndyce getting to Richard's cash inheritance from the contested will.

Divisadero.

In Divisadero, the character of Coop is driven by material gain. Although Ondaatje never links his status as an adoptee and the cash nexus explicitly, one is given the sense that this young man's interest in the money is related to his lack of intimacy in his primary relationships.

18.

## Knowledge

### Bleak House.

The transcripts of the interviews for this research were full of adults either desperate to receive knowledge or desperate to give knowledge about the adoption. In Bleak House, Esther is desperate for some knowledge that would help her understand her situation. Without knowledge she casts around to get some snippet that would help her understand better. At one point she wonders aloud if she had worn a black frock then perhaps she had been to her mother's funeral.

### Divisadero

Ondaatje captures the need for knowledge at various points in the book Divisadero. He describes Claire as having been adopted as a replacement child for her adoptive father's lost wife. She knew nothing about her own birth mother. Like Esther in Bleak House, she had very little hard facts about her background. All she knew was that her dead birth mother 'had no relatives, or was a solitary'. Ondaatje paints pictures of the guesswork the adoptee makes about the past and its impact on the present.

19.

## Looking for meaning

### Bleak House

In the interviews for this research the theme of wanting 'meaning' appeared again and again. The adoption triangle wanted to get a proper sense of what had occurred and why. In the Bleak House novel, Dickens also illustrated the drive for meaning. His depiction of Esther as an adoptee who had been starved of meaning is a good example. In a sense the whole novel is about the journey of Esther not knowing where she came from and gradually finding out who her birth parents were.

### Divisadero

Ondaatje is notoriously opaque about any messages he wants to communicate in his novels. He tends to be contradictory and elliptical. However at various points he seems to get into focus and deliver his view of 'meaning' coming from our various sets of

relationships in our lives. He is not clear that he is describing adoption in every part of the novel, but it is interesting to speculate that this is his intention when he writes of the past's impact on the present and the manner in which we all take meaning from it.

20.

### Loyalty

#### Bleak House

In the material from the research interviews, the theme of loyalty appeared regularly. The members of the adoption triangle often felt they needed to consult one of the triad in relation to the other one. It could be said that Dickens also had a sense of this in Bleak House. In the dramatic scene in which Lady Dedlock presents herself to Esther as her birth mother, the need for absolute secrecy is repeated again and again by Lady Dedlock. As soon as Esther has the news, she immediately brings up her adoptive parent Jarndyce. Could it be that Dickens was bringing our attention to the same phenomenon of loyalty? In this scene Lady Dedlock has just disclosed to Esther that she is her birth mother. One of Esther's first reactions to the discovery of her birth mother is of loyalty to Jarndyce her adoptive father.

21.

### Gratitude

#### Bleak House

The interviewees from this research often spoke about feelings of gratitude. It was a complex picture with other opposing features but consciously gratitude was presented regularly. Bleak House also explored gratitude. The character of Esther might be cloyingly sweet to the modern reader but Dickens uses her apparent naivety to explore the personality of an adoptee who strives to be 'good' in the case of her uncertain identity. Throughout the book he writes of her gratitude to her godmother / aunt, her adoptive parent Jarndyce and then at the end of the story, to her husband Dr Allan Woodcourt.



22.

Rule breaking

Bleak House

An unexpected theme from the interviews for this research was that of 'rule breaking'. Many of the reports were of social rules being broken to prioritise the adoption issues. In Bleak House there were many examples of this. Jarndyce for example has taken over the care of the child Esther and anonymously observes her in a coach on the way to her boarding school. His voyeuristic need to make sure she is a 'good girl' trumps the normal social rules of introductions etc.

23.

Importance of siblings

Bleak House

In this research the importance of siblings was often referred to. It seemed often that the triangular nature of adoption made the relationships between siblings more important. Cross referencing with another seemed to make experiences more understandable. In Bleak House, Dickens described an intimate relationship between Esther and Ada. Perhaps their love of each other helped them to understand the process of being adopted by the generous but sometimes misguided Jarndyce. In one scene Esther is seriously ill with smallpox and in her love of Ada, is firmly locking her out in case she is infected.

Divisadero

The adoptee Claire's need of her adoptive siblings Coop and Anna is apparent in Divisadero. Ondaatje has her reflect on the trio that they formed as they were growing up and how crucial he was to her development.

24.

Second rejection more painful

### Bleak House

In the research interviews with the adoptees and birth parents there was an emerging theme about the emotionality of searching but the reunion failing. The pain of the second rejection was immense. In Bleak House the adoptee Esther does meet her birth mother Lady Dedlock but the latter insists on it never being repeated. She fears that her secret will become known and her marriage would fail as a result. The 'good girl' Esther accepts this but is clearly in agony as the much wanted birth mother leaves her (again).

25.

### Possessiveness

### Bleak House

In the material from the adoptive parents interviewed for this research there was a recurring theme of possessiveness. The adoptive parents articulated this strongly. This was also true in Dickens' Bleak House. The adoptive parent Jarndyce's relationship with Esther is a complex one with possible sexual overtones but at times it presented as possessive. At the end of the novel, Jarndyce has secretly built another Bleak House for Esther and Dr Allan Woodcourt. He sets them both up for marriage and domestic life. He treats Esther as his possession that he can pass on to Woodcourt.

### Divisadero.

Ondaatje also describes an adoptive parent's tendency to ownership when he writes of the isolated and grieving Mr Mendez. This adoptive father of Coop adopts him with his wife. However, when she dies he is not able to be in tune with the boy. He treats him as a hired hand rather than an adopted son.

26.

### Rescue

### Bleak House.

The interviews with adoptive parents for this research highlighted a theme of wanting to ‘rescue’ the children. The strong communication was about needing to take over the care of the child. John Jarndyce sees himself as a rescuer of Esther and others in general. Dickens is not particularly clear about the extent of Jarndyce’s knowledge of Esther’s background. However he is clear about his personality trait of taking on other human beings to rescue them. He materially supports the misplaced ‘telescopic philanthropy’ of Mrs Jellyby and the morally dubious Skimpole. His adoption of Esther begins when she is in her teens and one suspects that he consciously wants to ‘save’ her from the 19<sup>th</sup> century treatment of illegitimate children. Perhaps he wants to protect her and rescue her from the danger of falling into prostitution?<sup>49</sup>

### Discussion.

We can see that these two authors have elaborated *many* of the themes that were present in the transcriptions of the interviews for this research (26 of the 32 identified themes from the interviews). It confirms the assertion that the writer of fiction has much to offer the exploration of the inner world. These two novels have described the complex emotional reactions to adoption across the adoption triangle that resonates with the narratives found in the research interviews.

Not all the themes were present. (See appendix nineteen, twenty and twenty-one.) However there is a remarkable concordance between the interview data and the novelist’s perspective on adoption.

- The reader will recall that of the 32 themes from the interviews, 25 were apparent across the entire adoption triangle. The two novels provided 23 of the 25 across all three. There was no evidence of the themes of ‘continuity’ or ‘mismatch internal and reality’.

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<sup>49</sup> Dickens was active in running a small residential home to assist women in difficulties and to rehabilitate them from prostitution (Tomalin 1991, 2011)

- Interestingly, the novels did not provide evidence in the category of themes found in only *one* of the triadic members. There was no evidence of ‘family romance’ theme found in the interviews of adoptees only.
- There was no evidence of ‘competition’, ‘gaining at the expense of others’ and ‘leap frogging’ which were found in the adoptive parents *only*.

This overlap of the interview data and the analysis of the two novels is presented in a diagram in appendix twenty-one.

Both novels were the creative product of men from very different times. They write in very different genres and for different purposes. However, it is remarkable that both writers bring out most of the themes that the interviewees discussed for this research. It is safe to conclude therefore that writers of fiction dealing with adoption have a concordance with the issues of the adoption triangle interviewees for this research.

## **Chapter eleven**

### Discussion and conclusion.

#### Introduction

This research triangulated interviewee material, psychoanalytic concepts and two works of fiction that dealt with adoption. Using more than one approach to the research question enhanced the confidence in the findings (Denzin 1970). The twelve interviews, the inheritance of psychoanalytic concepts applicable to adoption and the creative products of two writers at the peak of their powers have all overlapped but have very different forms and roots.

The material provided by the interviewees did confirm the value of psychoanalytic concepts in adoption. To answer the research question, the map did certainly fit the terrain. Secondly, the two pieces of fiction also confirmed the resonance of many of the themes from the interview transcripts (see chapter ten and appendix nineteen, twenty and twenty-one). The second part of the research question has therefore been answered in that the writers of fiction were clearly contributing enormously to the fuller understanding of the dynamics of adoption.

The searching dimensions of the research question have also been responded to. In a sense the research largely confirmed the expected broad themes of loss and its sequelae. However some of the findings were new. Many criticisms of psychoanalysis have centred on its lack of a (particular version) of scientific structure (Popper 1976) and an over reliance on the single case studies etc (Richardson 2001). Many of these criticisms can be refuted (De Maat et al 2007, Gabbard 2009, Harvard Medical School 2010, Kennedy 2004, Kennedy and Midgley 2007, Shedler 2010,) but perhaps there is some truth when the critics describe psychoanalysis as not having a robust *self* critical stance. For a healthy discipline it is important to consider criticism and maintain a dialectical position. When material does not fit exactly into the extant models, there may continue to be a tendency or temptation to cling to the model rather than interrogate any new evidence and consider reviewing theories.

The presentation of hypotheses in the preceding chapter was generated by responding to the new findings from the interview material. Although the sample of interviewees provided a data set of rich narratives, it was relatively small (12) in this exploratory study. A much larger data set might clarify how consistent these discoveries may be.

The thematic analysis of the 13 new findings from the transcripts triggered some re-thinking about the adoption process. The generated hypotheses are not a radical departure from the range of the previously accepted ideas but there is a different emphasis. The main findings suggest that psychoanalytical clinical work with the adoption triangle may need to incorporate a different lens when exploring material. As Brinich (1980) wrote

“The treatment of an adoptive child will necessarily include analysis of transference manifestations deriving from both the adoptive parent and the [unknown] biological parents, about whom the child will have constructed elaborate fantasies in order to make sense of his adoption”. (Brinich 1980:126)

The lessons from this research suggest that it is *even* more complicated than Brinich described. I will return to this theme later.

### The development of the Oedipal theories

Before elaborating on the main findings, a recap. As noted throughout this research it is a normal developmental achievement when some forms of triangular relationships can be sustained. To be able to tolerate the relationships that your primary parent has with others is an essential building block for emotional life.

The discoveries of primitive states of mind in young children were part of Sigmund Freud’s ground breaking journey in understanding the inner world. His period of self analysis put him in touch with his own desires for his mother and his rejection of his father (Gay 1988). As an ambitious man of his time, Freud felt that he had to elaborate the centrality of his Oedipus complex (‘the core complex’) in a clear chronological and

developmental framework (Gay 1988). In this way the infant begins with primary narcissism and grows up and passes through various stages. These are the psychosexual stages in which the child is preoccupied with the changing erogenous zones of oral, anal, phallic and genital.

Freud was being enormously innovative at this time (1900). However, it could be argued that he left the further development of the idea to followers. Indeed Young (1994) comments that despite Oedipus being the centrepiece of his work, he never wrote a systematic exposition of his mature views and in many ways Freud's Oedipus remained at the level of whole objects.

One of the subsequent theorists who built on Freud's foundations was Melanie Klein. She worked hard to be consistent with his legacy but eventually formed her own version of this important theoretical area (Klein 1945). From her experience of working with disturbed children, she felt comfortable in describing the sexual nature of the infant's relationship with parents. She utilised Abraham's (1924) idea of relationships with only parts of the parent's bodies. Where Sigmund Freud thought about whole objects, Klein had extended the scenes to include part object relationships. It was this development of the 'Oedipal situation' that allowed Klein to eventually develop another of her key concepts, namely the 'depressive position' (Likierman 2001).

For Klein, infants were object relating from birth and all relationships were to an extent triangular. When the infant wants to idealise the part object relationship with the breast, the hatred is said to be split off into a third object. This triangularity is described well by Rusbridger (1999).

"When the child's physiological, cognitive and emotional development during the first year of life enable it to begin to realize that its attacks have been on the very person whom it also loves, pain and guilt are the consequence. One outcome of this pain can take the form of regression to antecedent claims of possession, a denial of reality and splitting. Another outcome can be a relinquishing by the child of his intrusive taking-over of the loved parent. He can allow the parents to have a separate relationship – to have their own minds and their own joint existence. This entails facing his aloneness and mourning the loss of the hoped-for relationship. However, this is mitigated when all

goes well in development by the internalization of a conception of a creative couple who are allowed to be creative. This is another way of saying that the mitigation for losing this hoped-for relation is the development of a truthful relation to reality, which is the core of psychic health.” (Rusbridger 1999:490)

In short, with optimal development, the giving up of the intense love of the opposite sex parent and rejection of the same sex parent eventually has a gain for the child. The healing of the split allows for the internalisation of the capacity for triangulation.

Paradoxically the parental couple’s very existence is eventually the child’s source of development. With some resolution of the Oedipal challenge, children come to experience the couple as a source of benefit. The parental couple is able to help the child contain possessive and hostile feelings and the seeds of a conscience are grown. Indeed the growth of the mind is dependent on the internal relationships we have with the parental couple.

The capacity for triangularity is therefore a developmental achievement. Britton (1989) captured it thus:

“The primal family triangle provides the child with two links connecting him separately with each parent and confronts him with the link between them which excludes him. Initially this parental link is conceived in primitive part-object terms and in the modes of his own oral, anal and genital desires, and in terms of his hatred expressed in oral, anal and genital terms. If the link between the parents perceived in love and hate can be tolerated in the child’s mind, it provides him with a prototype for an object relationship of a third kind in which he is a witness and not a participant. A third position then comes into existence from which object relationships can be observed. Given this, we can also envisage *being* observed. This provides us with a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves.” (Britton, 1989:87)

Britton has argued therefore that it is crucial to establish the ‘third position’ by working through the Oedipal situation. In this way we can know that we are excluded from the parental couple and yet still be loved by our parents. Relative success in this area allows



us to have empathic engagement with the subjectivity of others and the capacity to observe this very process. In essence this working through of the Oedipal issues is a developmental challenge for us all. It presents each and every one of us with a complex and lifelong inner world struggle that we wrestle with constantly.

Furthermore, in every family (adoptive *and* non-adoptive) each family member is involved in a series of conscious and unconscious inter-relationships and pre-occupations with each other. Firstly, the couple's relationship is certainly full of Oedipal factors. Grier (2005) brought together the many ways in which partner choice and the creation of the very capacity to be in a couple rests on some working through of the Oedipal issue. Ruszczynski (2005) describes it this way:

“... given that the intimate adult couple relationship is likely to recreate some of the couple's shared, unresolved oedipal conflicts, a symbolically similar process can take place within the dynamics of that relationship itself. By withdrawing the narcissistic and omnipotent projective identifications from each other, the couple not only move towards a greater degree of integration between themselves, but their relationship is allowed to develop along the lines of more whole-object relating in its own right and become established as a symbolic, third object. This creates the possibility of ... a ‘marital triangle’, within which there is the reflective and thinking space to address the appropriate needs and requirements of each of the partners in the couple, and of their relationship”. (Ruszczynski, 2005:46)

As described above, the growing child is faced with the reality of the parental couple and must resolve something about this to develop. However there are more sources of triangularity. The siblings will be pre-occupied with each other through rivalry for the parents. Rivalry is not the only flavour. Brothers and sisters may ebb and flow by forming alliances together against and for either or both parents. Each of the parents will be aware of each other at many different levels as parents. One parent may feel ousted from the couple and be concerned that the child is more central than the couple to the other parent.

In this sense there is a triangular preoccupation that is not uncommon and *not* specific to the world of adoption.

### The nature of the different quality of adoption triangularity

It is important at this point to repeat again that the empirical part of this research was mostly about infant adoption. There is probably a psychological impact continuum from adoption through ‘special guardianship’ and kinship placements, long term fostering to reconstituted families as a result of divorce (see appendix twenty-two). Certainly the mainstream research findings suggest that of the range of options for substitute care in general, adoption is thought to subjectively feel more secure to all the participants (Wrobel and Neil 2009).

The material from the interviews for this research did highlight a different quality to the nature of triangular relationships in adoption. It was more complex but it was also subtle and difficult to clarify. (Interestingly it was also true in the analysis of the two novels dealing with adoption.<sup>50</sup> See chapter 10 and appendix 19.)

One dimension was the nature of the relationship knowledge. In non-adoption related families, relationships are based on the known parameters of other people. The biological links between the family members facilitates the knowledge of others in a particular way. For example, the non-adopted child will know of his mother’s relationship with his father and the triangularity of this is clear. The couple had sex and the result was this child. Even an absent father was known to have been in a certain conjunction with the mother. Even if it was fleeting and not filled with love, it is *known in a particular way*.

In contrast, the adoption triad is qualitatively different. There is a triangular relationship that is not known in the same way. For example, the adopted child may not know of his

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<sup>50</sup> In *Bleak House*, Dickens described the free association of Esther the adoptee when she first comes across her birth mother Lady Dedlock. She associates to her previous first substitute carer (her Godmother). Ondaatje also describes the adoptee Claire in *Divisadero* as having preoccupied thoughts about her own birth family (horse people) as she struggles with the aloof nature of her adoptive father (Mr Mendez). Ondaatje and Dickens are showing us the fleeting and constantly changing triangular relationships in adoption.

mother and may have no idea about her relationship with his father. Was it based on love or hate? Was the created child an intrusion or welcomed? The triangularity of this is less certain and more open to fantasy and phantasy. This is true for all of the adoption triad members but it manifests itself in slightly different ways in all three. Adoptive parent #3 was certainly full of fantasies and phantasies about the birth couple and the manner in which her adopted son was created and nurtured for the early part of his life in another country and culture.

Secondly, there is a primitive dimension to adoption that is less true of other relationships. It is the primary relationship between an infant and a mother that has been altered. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the ability to properly 'know' about the loss is different. Even if families broke up as a result of devastating domestic violence or abuse, it is still *subjectively* of a different order to adoption. 'Daddy was mean to mummy and left' is a different narrative from those usually found in adoption. Often adoption narratives are in a much less developed condition and in a more primitive state. 'Why was I given up for adoption'? This kind of narrative sits at the very heart of one's existence. Typically the adoptee would question their capacity to be loved because they were adopted. The birth mother would question her own capacities to nurture. The adoptive parents would perhaps survive the trauma of infertility and be consumed with fears about biological inheritance and how this dovetails with their nurture of the adopted child. These I would argue are located at a fundamental point in the psyche.

It was certainly evident in the story from Adoptee #3. When her birth mother refused to have contact with her after the search and her adoptive father let it slip that he never felt any strong attachment to his adoptive children, the primitive nature of the pain was abundantly clear in the interview.

Thirdly, perceived rejection and abandonment from the maternal object makes adoption related relationships different. Currently, it is adoption social work practice to facilitate a clear decision to place an infant for adoption from the birth mother. There are some cases where child protection matters lead to the State taking over the decision of permanent removal. However the *perception* is often that the mother gave her infant up (Eldridge 2004, Triseliotis 2000). Such abandonment flavours relationships and can

make adoption triangularity different. When adoptee #2 told her story about her re-union with her birth mother and the discovery that this woman did not know her birthday, she communicated a powerful sense of shock at the extent of her birth mother's abandonment.

### Bottles and Ghosts. Metaphors for understanding adoption related relationships

Let me now recap and develop further my consideration of the interview material. The most obvious finding was the quality for those in the adoption triangle of a particular version of triangularity. As noted above it is an individual developmental achievement to reach a level of triangularity and it is a common theme in couples and families (adoptive and non-adoptive). However, the findings of this research suggest that the adoptive situation introduces a specific layer of complexity.

To clearly define this differing quality of *adoption* triangularity is a challenge. To capture something about the quality of quite primitive relationships in constant flux puts a strain on language.

In conversations with my tutors for this research, the following metaphor was floated. The adoption triangularity might be likened to a glass bottle that is smashed and then re-assembled. Even if the parts of the bottle are painstakingly and patiently put back together again, the fault lines remain. The glass bottle may retain most of its original shape and might perform all of its functions. However, even if expertly restored, it is in a new orientation. Its relationship to itself is different.

Whilst resisting the temptation to drag the metaphor too far, we might say that the bottle is now something else. It was a bottle and now it is a reconstituted bottle. The joins of the repaired bottle may be water-tight but there is now a different set of tensions between each of the parts that were broken. The inter-relationships are glued rather than in a homogenised structure.

This metaphor seemed initially useful in that it described something about the reconstituted nature of adoption relationships. However in the end it was felt to be

incomplete. It did not properly account for the way in which many in the adoption triangle were in a *fluid* state. This metaphor tended to suggest adoption was a singular incident rather than a process that evolved at each developmental state for each of the adoption triad members.

Others have been in this same area and have used various conceptual tools. For example, Betty Jean Lifton was a keen observer of the phenomena of adoption (1975, 1979, 1990, 1994, 2007 and 2010). Her description uses an idea of ghosts.

“The adopted child is always accompanied by the ghost of the child he might have been had he stayed with his birth mother and by the ghost of the fantasy child his adoptive parents might have had. He is also accompanied by the ghost of the birth mother, from whom he has never completely disconnected, and the ghost of the birth father, hidden behind her.

The adoptive mother and father are accompanied by the ghost of the perfect biological child they might have had, who walks beside the adopted child who is taking its place. The birth mother (and father, to a lesser extent) is accompanied by a retinue of ghosts. The ghost of the baby she gave up. The ghost of her lost lover, whom she connects with the baby. The ghost of the mother she might have been. And the ghosts of the baby’s adoptive parents.” (Lifton 1994:11)

Lifton manages to find this way of communicating the ‘other worldli-ness’ of the relationships formed in adoption. It also paints a picture of being haunted by the past. It does not however help to fully explain the constantly changing picture of the relationships or the subjective reality of them to the participants.

(Brinich is also a commentator who has contributed enormously to the psychoanalytic thinking about adoption and in particular this sense of the different quality of adoption triangularity (Brinich 1980, 1990a, 1990b, 1995). His work was explored in some depth in chapter three.)

### Two Major Conclusions

There are two overall conclusions to this study which are linked to each other:

- 1) The articulation of the possible triangular dynamics of adoption as it differs in complexity along several dimensions from those of non-adoptive triangles
- 2) The impact of this on the nature of searching

### Triangular Psychology

This research found again and again that the triad members were preoccupied with each other. This took slightly different forms but was essentially true for all three corners of the triangle. In the 'search and re-union' literature there has been a range of works mostly exploring the dyad that is adoptees and birth parents. (Feast and Philpot 2003, Howe and Feast 2000, Triseliotis, Feast and Kyle 2005). However this qualitative study suggested that it is much more triadic. The adoptive parents tended to articulate and present slightly differently. However the main dynamic was the same.

This triangular psychology is therefore the central spine of the new findings. Many of the other new findings were intertwined with this idea of each of the players in adoption having the other two in mind often consciously and unconsciously.

The key finding of this research suggests that the triangularity of adoption is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that it involves at least two systems for each of the triadic members. The adoptee is in a triangular relationship with both his adoptive parents and his birth parents and their relationships with each other. This is true in the present but he is *also* in a relationship with all that has been lost. That is to say the vast potential lives he might have had if he had not been adopted. This parallel world seeps into the adoptee's life consciously and unconsciously.

Similarly, the birth parent is in a relationship with the adopted child and the adoptive parents and their relationships with each other. The birth parent experiences this in the present but also with her potential life had she not given the child up for adoption. Again the interaction between past and present, potential and actual makes the adoption triangularity different in quality. Thirdly, the adoptive parent is in a relationship with the adopted child and the parent of that child (and their relationship with each other) but

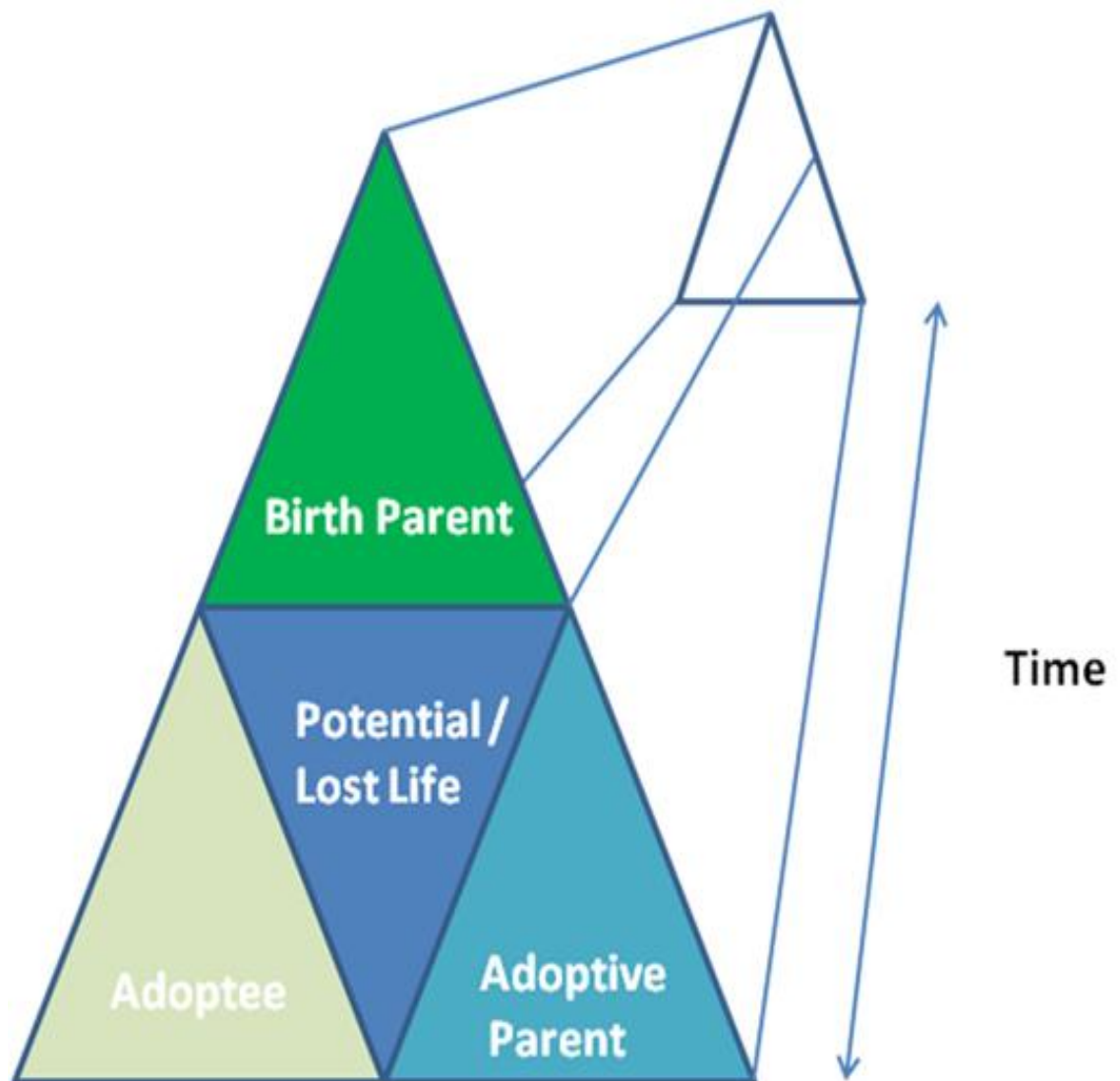
also the lost potential biological child and/or the fantasy perfect adoptee that they were not matched with. This quality of a parallel life of ‘what might have been’ is powerful.<sup>51</sup>

The following diagram is based on the data from the interviews for this research. It captures the adoption triad in a complex relationship with itself.

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<sup>51</sup> Interestingly both of the chosen novels for this research also have major themes of how the past impacts the present. Both Ondaatje and Dickens play with the ideas of the interactions of past and present. See chapter 10 and appendix 20.

## Triangular Psychology in Diagram Form





The front face of the diagram is the familiar equilateral triangle. It has the same adoption triad members who are in a relationship with each other. However it also contains a centre triangle that abuts all the other three. It stands for the potential or lost life which flavours the quality of the adoption triangularity. This centre triangle contains that set of losses both real and possible that must be mourned by the entire adoption triangle.

This diagram is designed to convey the sense of three dimensions with time being a key factor. If the reader can imagine the front face is a slice and the shape goes backwards into the past but also forwards into the future. The 'toblerone' shape (or triangular prism or pentahedron) was chosen to denote the fluidity of time in a number of different levels.

Firstly, in a straightforward way for all in the adoption triangle, the meaning of the adoption process will need to be re-visited and re-worked at each developmental stage (Brodzinsky 1990). In reality the triad members will deal with adoption in their own chronological and developmental state. The interview material for this research often suggested that for all triad members, their relationships evolved over time. In this way the adoptee at 8 years old will have a different understanding of the adoption than the same adoptee at aged 28. The adoptive parent of an infant will narrate the adoption story in a different way to the adoptive parent with an adolescent adoptee.

However in addition to this there will be a much more complex non-chronological, non-logical and intermittent relationship to potential lives that never took place. This research suggests that this is true of all in the triangle and is omnipresent. The adoption stories contained descriptions of states of mind that fluctuated from minute to minute and allowed contradictory themes to exist side by side.

For example the narrative of adoptee#2 who sometimes was grateful for having been adopted and almost in the same sentence was appalled that any mother could give up her child. She railed against the adoptive parents for removing her and thanked them for the opportunities they provided. She was in touch with herself as an infant and as an adult. She could conceive of her life had she not been adopted. Birth parent #1 grieved the loss of her daughter and at the same time was in touch with the lack of maternal

capacity she had when she was a young pregnant teenager. Her life had she not given her daughter up for adoption was very real to her at times. Adoptive parent #2 was simultaneously in touch with her terror but also her plan to support her young adopted son making contact with his birth mother in the future and the past neglected child that he had been.

There was evidence that each triad member could enter states of mind in which the past, present and future could intermingle. From moment to moment they interacted with each other as they were, as they are, as they will be and as they could have been. The third dimension of the triangular shape therefore conveys the complicated relationship across time.

To return to the 'toblerone' diagram, the reader might envisage the state of mind of the adoptive parent, the adoptee and the birth parent as they relate to each other across time and across actual reality and lost potentiality. Each of the triangles in the 'toblerone' shape can be in complex interactions within any point within the shape. The reader might imagine a corkscrew motion within the triangle as the states of mind of each the adoption triad members move back and forwards in time, in reality and in fantasy (phantasy). This is presented in a diagram form in appendix twenty-three.

### Searching as a triadic phenomenon

The second key finding of this research was not unexpected. It was clear from the preliminary reading of the literature that searching was a phenomenon in adoption. The classic early text was probably Triseliotis 1973. (See also appendix 15.) However it was clearer in this research that this was also triadic. It again manifested itself in slightly different ways. Some triadic members were active in their search and spent a considerable amount of energy searching in the external world. Others searched in an intra psychic manner.

The search by adoptees and birth parents was often intra psychic for many years before moving into searching in the external world (Howe and Feast 2000). Often this transition would be heralded by a life cycle event (birth, death, marriage etc). The

search by the adoptive parents often remained at the level of the intra psychic searching but often remained a constant preoccupation that it would morph into re-union in the external world. The adoptive parents often had been on a searching journey for a biological child which failed. The search then became one to find the perfect adoptee. The anxiety then seems to be that the other two in the triad will find each other in reality and exclude the adoptive parent.

The two main findings (triangular psychology and searching) are in a very real way linked. They explain each other. The adoptee *and* the birth parent *and* the adoptive parent are all preoccupied by the triangular relationships that came together to make the adoptee (birth parents in nature, adoptive parents in nurture). The restlessness that is part of this preoccupation is the link between triangular psychology and searching. In a sense, searching intra psychically or in the external world is a necessary corollary of triangular psychology.

#### Clinical implications.

From a clinical perspective the findings should challenge some psychotherapeutic models. Theoretically Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists will be aware of Britton's conception of the 'third position' described above. This assists us in thinking about the non adoption related individual's manner of development. However in adoption related individuals, this is more complex. Like three dimensional chess, each one of the triad members is in a relationship consciously and unconsciously, in the present and in the past, in fantasy (phantasy) and in reality with the two others of the adoption triangle. These relationships are located at a primitive / early developmental point. In practice the clinician faced with this multi-factorial equation needs to broaden the lens. More elaborate object relationships need to be conceived.

The new findings from this research could have an impact on clinical practice. To open up more levels of relationships in adoption related people will challenge the attuned clinician. To bear to face the multi dimensional complexity of the work will require courage and tenacity in the face of pressures (from within and without) to simplify it.

Most clinicians will only be working with two sides of the adoption triangle. For example most CAMHS<sup>52</sup> clinicians would typically only see the adoptive parents and the adopted children. Rarely would they be involved with the birth parents. The implications from this research suggest that the third needs to be held in mind and constantly thought about.

The case presented in chapter one is a good example. The reader will recall that the little boy struggled to access the nurture that was available in his adoptive parents. The problems he had with this led to his referral for psychotherapy. In chapter one I suggested that in the transference I often stood for the rejecting birth parents. With the ideas from the empirical part of this research and the concept of triangular psychology, we might unfold a whole series of other object relationships. The boy may have been transferentially relating to his birth parents or the part of himself that led to his abandonment in the past or to the future version of himself that he believes the adoptive parent could never reject. He may have been relating to his adoptive parent as a kidnapper or a rescuer of himself. He may have been reacting to her as being absent in those difficult early years with his parents. The adoptive mother could have been relating to a child she never conceived and / or the son who will return to the birth mother in the future. The triangular psychology makes the range of relationships much more varied.

### Reflections and Potentialities

The findings from this research have led to a number of potential paths. Firstly, it would be interesting to continue with the methodology and increase the sample to see if the same themes emerge. The current sample was recruited to reflect mainstream adoption and was limited to four people from each of the adoption triad groups (12 in total). Ideally a larger sample would test the hypotheses generated in chapter nine. Secondly, it would be intriguing to explore a different kind of adoption population for example late placed adopted children, children adopted from substitute care or international adoption. This research recruited mostly infant adoption narratives not because of explicit

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<sup>52</sup> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are the teams which offer mental health services to children, adolescents and their families within the NHS in the UK.

selection criteria. We know that non-infant adoption has different trajectories and it would be useful to investigate using the same method. Thirdly, it might add to the strength of the findings if I were to explore and cross reference the themes in the material with another researcher. This would further test the reliability of the themes that emerged from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a rigorous system but it would be an interesting development to invite other people to interrogate the same data.

In terms of practice implications, the findings of this research could be fed back to the various professionals dealing with the adoption processes (Child Psychotherapists, Adult Psychotherapists, Social Workers, and Teachers etc). It is important that the increased levels of complexities become known to those working with the adoption triad. The pressure to keep things simple and as close to the surface comes from both within and without. Individually to face the unique complexity of each adoption story is an existential challenge.

In society for many years there has been a reductionist push towards simple solutions to the complex nature of adoption. Target led thinking can be seen in recent New Labour policies as well as plans being put forward by current coalition government. This research goes against this flow by providing evidence of the uniqueness of each adoptee, birth parent and adoptive parent dealing with conscious and unconscious forces across time in a very fluid manner. The politicians who argue that simple packages of universal shape can address the loss inherent in adoption are contradicted by the findings of this research.

Given the above, it is no surprise that this research found the contribution of the fiction writer to the understanding of adoption complexity was immense. Perhaps because they are less constrained by the pressures to codify, writers from very different epochs and in very different genres were able to capture the sophisticated and subtle powers influencing the adoption process. The experience of this discovery suggests to me that the training of clinicians should include more of the lessons from literature. The author's depiction of the inner world could act as a 'double narrative'. The novel might assist close observation and theory building for trainee psychotherapists. Exploring the human condition using the insight of the novelist could be a rich contribution to those training in any work with the inner world.

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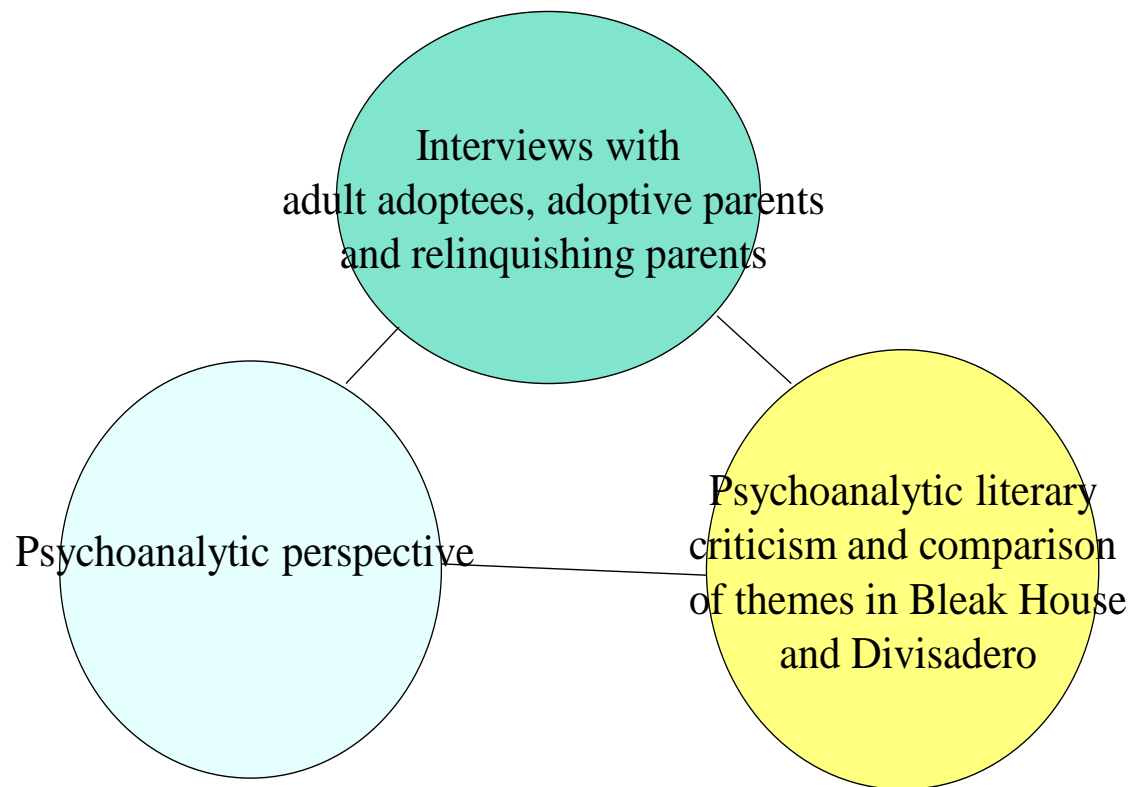
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**Appendix one.**



Triangulated data sources.



**Appendix two.**

Transcript timings in minutes.

M18#1A	51.47	Longest first session	
M18#1B	30.48		
M18#2A	27.24		
M18#2B	26.30		
M18#3A	26.44		
M18#3B	31.15		
M18#4A	6.24	Shortest first session	
M18#4B	14.09		
M18#5A	40.42		
M18#5B	13.59		
M18#6A	20.37		
M18#6B	14.47		
M18#7A	33.20		
M18#7B	24.18		
M18#8A	22.16		
M18#8B	39.26	Longest second session	
M18#9A	(20.28 2.56) 23.24		
M18#9B	18.33		
M18#10A	15.14		
M18#10B	26.04		

M18#11A	(21.09 2.33) 23.42		
M18#11B	11.42	Shortest second session	
M18#12A	(18.48 0.50) 19.38		
M18#12B	23.06		

### **Appendix 3**

Preliminary process and content of the analysis of the interviews.

Theoretical assumptions:

Loss and mourning will be present. However it may be consciously *or* unconsciously manifest. There will be defences against this loss and mourning.

This will manifest itself at each (and every) developmental stage.

Fantasies (and phantasies) will be present about the others in the adoption triangle.

Searching will have been considered.

Resolving ambivalence will be compromised.

During the interview was there evidence of:

Loss acknowledged?

Loss mourned?

Fantasies (and phantasies)? Access to this is problematic in this research which does not involve therapeutic relationships.

Searching acknowledged?

Searching activated?

Searching planned?

Difficulties with ambivalence?

Identification with others in the triangle?

In the relationship between interviewee and interviewer...

What *observably* happens between the interviewer and the interviewee?

What is the emotional tone?

How does interviewee relate to interviewer?

How does the interviewee relate to task?

Analysis of the object relations underpinning the interview.

What kind of object am I to the interviewee?

What kind of object has the task of being interviewed become?

What underlying object constellations surround adoption?

Are there counter transference reactions?

How have the transferential positions impacted the generation of hypothesis about adoption

Robert Fleming

## **Appendix 4.**

### Interview Material Analysis Grid

Case type and number	Evidence of mourning?	Not actioned search?	Family life cycle event triggers search?	Actioned search but not found?	Actioned search and found?	Wants on-going relationship?	Search outcome positive?	Search outcome unclear / ambivalent?	Physical similarity issues?	Inter-Generational link issues?	Medical history knowledge issues?	Sexual, cultural or personal Identity issues?	Coherent narrative	Transference issues?	A-ha moment
<b>Adoptee #1</b>	No clear evidence. Possible manic defence?		Yes. Death of adoptive mother		Yes. Found birth mother.	Yes Birth mother, half brother, half sister	Yes	No	Yes. Description of same ears as birth family	Yes. Moving description of rapid change of hierarchy	No clear evidence	Yes. Cultural and race	Yes.	Interviewer considered person from another culture who would understand?	Birth nephew who will always have known him.
<b>Adoptee #2</b>	Yes. Trained in bereavement counselling. Tearful in session		Yes. Pregnant with first child.		Yes. Found birth mother.	No. Wary of birth mother	No	Yes	Yes. Body shape and size Mentioned. Looks like birth father	Yes. Use of alcohol same as birth dad	Yes. Cancer scare	Yes	Yes	Interviewer considered person who would understand lack of contact plan?	Birth mother forgets own daughter's birthday

<b>Adoptee #3</b>	Yes. Pain of second rejection from birth mother after search		Yes. On leaving home		Yes. Found birth mother but she does not want contact	No	No	Yes	No clear evidence	Yes. Search now focused on lost half brother.	Yes. Cancer scare	Yes	No. Brief account with initially no elaboration	Interviewer considered person who might criticise?	Adoptive father is over-heard saying that he never felt close.
<b>Adoptee #4</b>	No clear evidence.		Yes. After pregnant with first nonadopted child		Yes. Found half sister	Yes. With half sister and her family	Yes	No	Yes. Same hands as birth mother.	Yes.	No clear evidence	Yes	Yes	Interviewer considered person who would understand?	Non adopted half sister has same clothes on reunion

Case type and number	Evidence of mourning?	Not actioned search?	Family life cycle event triggers search?	Actioned search but not found?	Actioned search and found?	Wants on-going relationship?	Search outcome positive?	Search outcome unclear / ambivalent?	Physical similarity issues?	Inter-generational link issues	Medical history knowledge issues?	Sexual, cultural or personal Identity issues?	Coherent narrative	Transference issues?	A-ha moment
<b>Birth parent #1</b>	Yes. Much description of working through in therapy, in art and in dreams		Yes. Birth of brother's child and own nonadopted child		Yes. Daughter.	Yes. With daughter, her children and family	Yes.	No.	Yes. Same eyes	Yes. Wanted grandmother to know daughter	Yes. Weight problem.	Yes. 'Incomplete' without contact	Yes	Interviewer considered person who could understand?	Discovering similar interests in photography
<b>Birth parent #2</b>	Yes. Tearful during interview and much working through in therapy		Yes. Birth of first nonadopted child		Yes. Daughter	Yes but daughter wary of contact. No face to face.	No	Yes.	No clear evidence.	Yes. Wants to know grandchildren	Yes. Inherited genetic blood disorder. Cancer scare.	Yes. Devastated by loss.	Yes	Interviewer considered person who needs to be corrected?	Feeling rejected when daughter does not want face to face contact.

<b>Birth parent #3</b>	Yes. Refers to 'disturbed mind'. Working though in self help group.		Yes. Youngest nonadopted son leaves home.		Yes. Daughter.	Yes but daughter refused face to face contact.	No	Yes	No clear evidence.	Yes. Adopted daughter wants link with half brother's children. Birth mother pride at being grandmother.	Yes. Diabetes	Yes. Loss of child defines her.	Yes	Interviewer considered person who might judge.	Feeling of rejection when 'no contact letter arrives.
<b>Birth parent #4</b>	Yes.		No. Church meeting for other birth parents		Yes. Daughter.	Yes but daughter has refused contact.	No	Yes	Yes. Hair, body type, colouring all mentioned	Yes. Links with birth mother half sister	No clear evidence	Yes.	Yes.	Interviewer considered person who would know about need to search	Covertly meeting daughter pretending to be a customer.



Case type and number	Evidence of mourning?	Not actioned search?	Family life cycle event triggers search?	Actioned search but not found?	Actioned search and found?	Wants on-going relationship?	Search outcome positive?	Search outcome unclear / ambivalent?	Physical similarity issues?	Inter-Generational link issues?	Medical history knowledge issues?	Sexual, cultural or personal Identity issues?	Coherent narrative	Transference issues?	A-Ha moment
<b>Adoptive parent #1</b>	Adoptive mother mourns loss of capacity to have another bio child.		Yes. Adoptive mother discovers infertility	Adopted children have not actioned search yet.	Ad. Mother searches and 'finds' two brothers.	Yes	Yes	No	Dis-similarity pointed out by ad. mother	Yes.	Yes. Gaps in medical history of adopted children mentioned.	No clear evidence	Yes	Interviewer considered risk (person who might link with birth parents?)	'Have to get this baby away' (from foster mother)
<b>Adoptive parent #2</b>	Adoptive mother mourns her infertility but also strongly empathises with birth father and his loss.		Discovery of infertility.	Adoptive children have not actioned search yet.	Ad. Mother searches and 'finds' two children to adopt	Yes	Yes	No	No clear evidence	No clear evidence	No clear evidence	No clear evidence	Yes	Interviewer considered person who will understand	'Is this child yours/ Yes!' (says ad. Mother on first day)

<b>Adoptive parent #3</b>	No clear evidence		No. Professional experience of working with children	Adopted child have not auctioned search yet	Ad mother searched over 4 countries for adopted child	Yes	Yes	No	No clear evidence.	Yes. Adoptive mother wanted to know as much as possible about birth parents.	Yes. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome was a big concern.	No clear evidence	Yes	Interviewer considered as risk to confidentiality.	The first look (between ad mother and child in orphanage)
<b>Adoptive parent #4</b>	No clear evidence		Yes. Infertility	Adopted child have not auctioned search yet	Ad mother 'finds' daughter.	Yes	Yes	No	No clear evidence	Yes. Much sympathy for birth mother and wish to know about her reality.	Yes. Much concern about details of medical history.	No clear evidence	Yes	Interviewer considered as standing for 'emotional' side of adoption.	Reading the Swer's profile.

## **Appendix five.**

### Brief Plot Synopsis.

The book opens with a striking single word. “London”. Dickens knew that he had to grip the reader and carry them instalment by instalment and this is one of his many ‘hooks’ in the early chapters. It might not be strictly grammatically correct but it is a most evocative opening section of any novel. It introduces us to the fogbound London and in particular the ‘murky’ machinations of the Chancery court. Dickens spends much of his energy in the book railing against the slow and self serving processes of this court. Gradually the camera of his description pans out to bring us the human tragedy of characters whose future is caught up in the dysfunctional web of this branch of law.

In the second chapter we are introduced to the Dedlocks and their aristocratic position in society. (See appendix six.) Many commentators place the story around the mid 1840s. They are one of the oldest families in England, they reside in both rural Lincolnshire and in London. We learn quickly about Sir Leicester’s politics and his wish that people remained in “their station in life”. Sir Leicester is much older than Lady Dedlock and Dickens paints a picture of her emotionally suffocating. She is famously “bored to death”. The proud and vain Lady Dedlock<sup>53</sup> holds a secret unknown even to Sir Leicester. Although the reader is not told the fact until much later in the novel, when she was young, she had an illegitimate child. This female infant was the product of her relationship with her lover Captain Hawdon. It seems that her family told her that the baby died at birth and, in the early chapters, she has no properly conscious idea that the child is actually still alive. The daughter is an adult at the start of Bleak House and at this point has no knowledge of her origins. She has been given a different name (Esther Summerson) by her carer. This re-naming is to clearly cover the shame of the illegitimacy. The truth is further compromised as Esther grows up believing that her carer is her godmother. Shortly after she dies, Esther discovers from a solicitor that in fact she was her maternal aunt. After the death of this aunt, John Jarndyce becomes Esther's guardian / adoptive father.

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<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this name is another aptronym. Lady Dedlock is so full of her undigested loss that she is locked out of life (Dead Lock).

Once in London she meets John Jarndyce's other two adoptees / wards, Ada Clare and Richard Carstone. Ada, Richard and Mr Jarndyce are parties to a complicated, long-standing legal suit called Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Various aspects of this entangled suit are heard from time to time in the High Court of Chancery in London. The issues involve, among other things, the apportionment of an inheritance following the mental health difficulties and eventual suicide of a wealthy relative of John Jarndyce. This man left many contradictory wills and the court has become involved in the disputes between various parties.

Gradually, Esther realises that Richard Carstone has some weaknesses of character. He appears to be lacking focus and tenacity in his life and yet remains likable. She forms a deep friendship with him as well as with the beautiful Ada. Slowly she becomes aware that the two young people are attracted to each other.

One "muddy, murky afternoon," while looking at some legal documents, Lady Dedlock is shocked to recognise the handwriting of her ex-lover Captain Hawdon whom she thought had drowned long ago. She asks Mr Tulkinghorn, the Dedlocks' solicitor, if he knows the writer but at this point he does not. Tulkinghorn is a self-serving, power-hungry and clever lawyer who later expends much energy finding out as much as he can about the writer and why it has such an impact on the notoriously disinterested and aloof Lady Dedlock. Eventually he discovers that the writing is that of a man currently called "Nemo" (Latin for no one). He is living an impoverished life in a chaotic "rag-and-bottle" shop owned by an old alcoholic and probably dyslexic man called Krook (Jacoby 1992). In this accommodation, Tulkinghorn finds Nemo dead from an overdose of opium. At the inquest into Nemo's death, a street child and orphan called Jo speaks up about his friend Nemo with the oft quoted phrase, "He [Nemo] was wery good to me, he wos!"

The tension in the novel rises as Lady Dedlock becomes increasingly anxious that her secret past will be discovered. In a desperate state of mind, she searches for her lost love. In her maid's coat, she locates Jo and (over) pays him to show her where her lover had lived and where he has been buried.

Tulkinghorn teams up with the estranged ex-maid of Lady Dedlock and gradually discovers the truth that Nemo was Captain Hawdon. He slowly understands the relationship between Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon and how powerful this knowledge makes him. In a calculatingly sadistic manner he confronts Lady Dedlock and although initially promises to hold the secret, later he threatens to let the story out.

However the ex-maid turns against Tulkinghorn and a short time later, Tulkinghorn is found shot dead. A detective, Mr Bucket, enters the story and begins his teasing investigation. The suspects include Lady Dedlock and George Rouncewell, son of the Dedlocks' housekeeper. Perhaps with some cruelty, Mr Bucket tells Sir Leicester about Lady Dedlock's dealings with Tulkinghorn<sup>54</sup>. Bucket says that she is a suspect and Lady Dedlock's secret is out. Sir Leicester falls seriously ill (with a cerebral haemorrhage) as a result and becomes paralysed. Although originally presented as aristocratic and arrogant, he responds to the shock and fully forgives his wife. Bucket later obtains the evidence that the murderer is the ex-maid.

The other important adoptee in Bleak House is Richard Carstone. He becomes indecisive about his career and drifts into and out of at least three different professions. Despite the material and emotional support of John Jarndyce and his network of social contacts, Richard Carstone is unable to achieve any momentum in his life. He becomes increasingly fascinated by the Jarndyce and Jarndyce lawsuit and psychologically distanced from his adoptive father John Jarndyce.

His sexual attraction to Ada blossoms and although John Jarndyce cautions against haste, he secretly marries Ada Clare as soon as she turns twenty-one and stops being a ward of court. His physical and psychological health begins to deteriorate as he becomes increasingly fixated on the machinations of the court and rejecting of his adoptive father. He is spending money that he does not have but hopes to inherit in a court settlement. There are hints that he is oscillating between manic states and depression.

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<sup>54</sup> In the scene in which Bucket tells Sir Dedlock he repeats the phrase, "ought to have been her husband" twice. It is not clear why Bucket cruelly repeats this shocking news about Lady Dedlock's illegitimate child. Perhaps Dickens felt he needed to make an alliance with the social mores of the time.

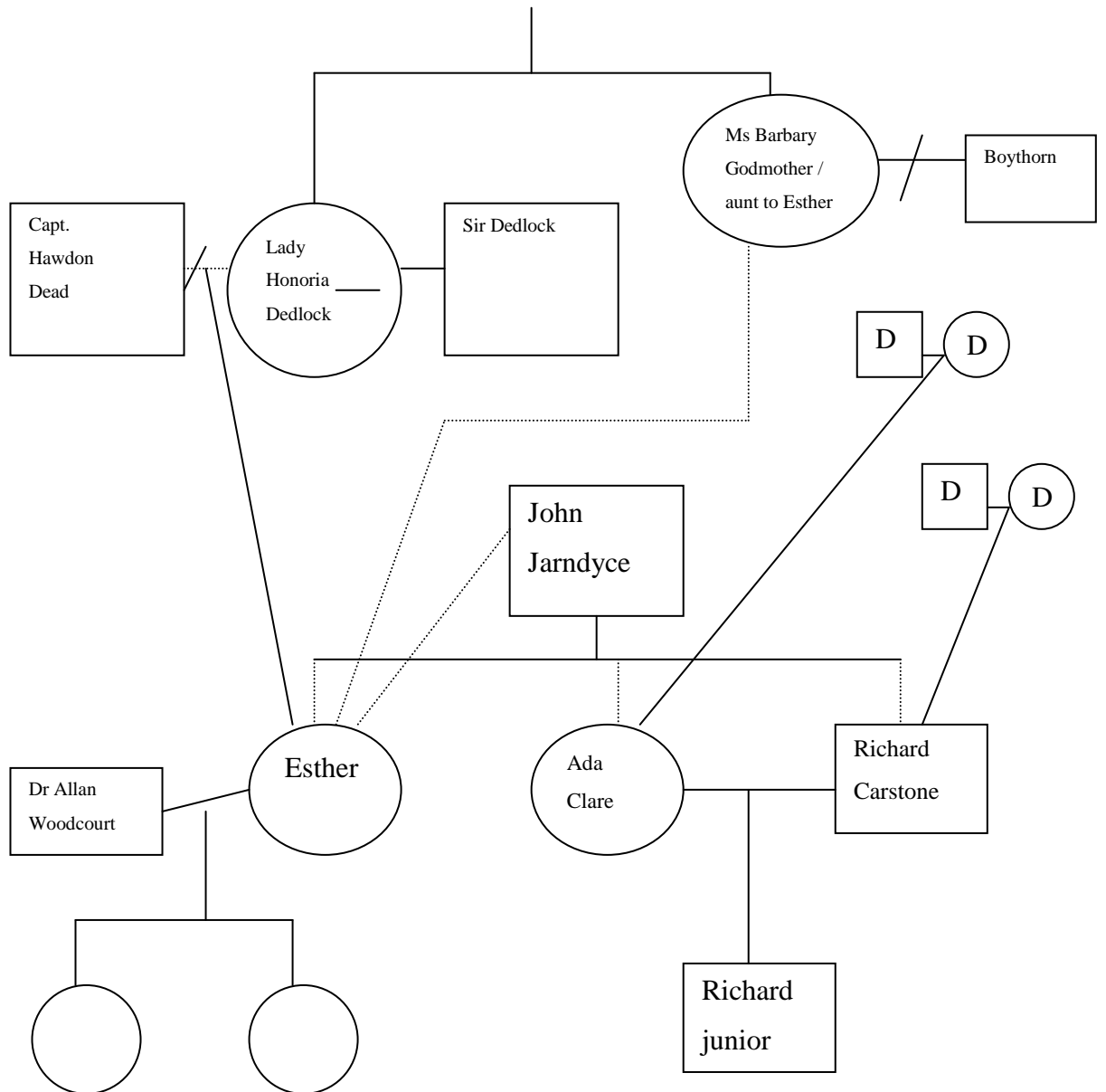
As Ada and Richard fall in love, in a parallel way Esther and a young impoverished doctor Allan Woodcourt are attracted to each other. Unsure of her feelings and even of her 'right' to have a sexual life, she does not initially reciprocate Dr Woodcourt's feelings. Indeed she instead accepts a letter describing a marriage proposal from Mr Jarndyce. This older man's attraction to the young adoptee Esther is complex. Their sexual relationship never really begins and clearly Esther responds to him as a fatherly figure whilst John Jarndyce apparently does not see himself in this way.

Jo, the street child and orphan, re-appears in the story with smallpox, and both Esther and her maid Charley later contract this disfiguring disease. Esther survives but with a scarred face. Shortly afterward, she learns that Lady Dedlock is her mother. Although many others in the story have noticed the similarity between them, it has taken Esther and Lady Dedlock a long time to face the truth of their relationship. After a poignant meeting, Lady Dedlock insists that they maintain the secret and try to continue without any further acknowledgement of each other.

Feeling disgrace and full of remorse, Lady Dedlock again dresses like an ordinary working woman and seeks her daughter to say goodbye. After an intensive search which acts as an important metaphor for the deep human longing to be truly found, Esther and Detective Bucket find her lying dead in the snow at the gates of a pauper's cemetery. This is where Captain Hawdon is buried.

The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is concluded at last, but legal fees have consumed all the money that Richard Carstone would have inherited. He dies, and, soon afterward, Ada gives birth to his child, whom she names Richard. John Jarndyce releases Esther from her engagement. He re-creates another Bleak House in the North of England as a gift for her. She marries Dr Allan Woodcourt and the last chapter describes the extended family living together and prospering.

**Appendix six.**



## **Appendix seven**

### Synopsis

The first part of *Divisadero* gradually introduces us to a farming family in California in the 1970s. (See appendix eight.) The adoptive couple have neighbours who were murdered by their own farm hand. The sole survivor is the young child of the family. Aged 4 years old Coop manages to escape death by hiding under the floorboards whilst the carnage takes place above him. This little boy remains in his hiding place for several days and it is his witness that allows the murderer to be caught. The couple adopt Coop.

Later when the wife dies in childbirth, the grieving father takes not only his own daughter Anna home from the hospital, but also adopts Claire. This infant's mother has also died in childbirth and she has no other family to care for her.

The blended family of two adoptees and a biological daughter evolve in the rural setting of North California. In early childhood the two girls have a twin-like quality. They are in-divisible. At one point Anna as an adult recalls her childhood with Claire and conjures up the image of twin foetuses that absorb the other.

However, Coop seems never to manage a close relationship with the adoptive father. Indeed as the story develops it seems that Coop is kept more like a farm hand than an adopted son. The book does not help us to understand this in great detail. Ondaatje creates the sense of the young man's losses without giving us substance. The reader is left wondering if Coop is so damaged by the trauma of losing his birth family that he protects himself against intimacy. However, there are clues about the adoptive father being distant and aloof. Perhaps in his grief for his dead wife he is unable to make himself fully available to this boy<sup>55</sup>.

The watershed in this part of the first story is when Anna begins a sexual relationship with Coop. As a storm breaks over the young lovers, the adoptive father discovers their sexual intimacy and attacks Coop. It looks as if the father will kill the un-retaliating

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<sup>55</sup> This point is picked up in research by Howe, D.(2007). In this work Howe suggests that undigested loss in the adoptive parents is a significant factor in adoption placement success or failure.



Coop with a wooden stool until Anna intervenes. She manages to stop the violence against her lover by stabbing her father with a shard of glass. Anna is 16 at this point and runs away from the family. She changes her name and spends the rest of her life looking back to this incident. All four members of the family are never the same again. This is the first division (Divisadero).

Anna regards herself as an orphan after the attack on Coop by her father. She refers to herself as “the person formerly known as Anna”. The reader meets Anna again in adulthood when she has become an academic. She is particularly interested in delving into the past in detail. “Those who have an orphan’s sense of history love history”. Her searching manifests itself in sifting through old notebooks and references to immerse herself in her subject. She is particularly interested in a (fictitious) mysterious French writer called Lucian Segura (security<sup>56</sup>). Years later we find her renting one of the old houses of this writer in the Gers region of France as she pieces together his story. We can see that her immersion in his story facilitates the digestion of her own story. She coincidentally meets a local gypsy man (Rafael) who, as a boy, knew the writer<sup>57</sup>. Indeed there are hints that the boy was adopted by the older man and that the separation from him was a trigger for the writer’s death. He realises that his feeling of loss of this boy has allowed him to face the distance he has created between himself and all others.

Coop is literally saved from death by Claire after the attack by the adoptive father. Years pass and Coop grows into a highly defended young man. He uses his talents to become a top poker player in the casinos of Lake Tahoe and Las Vegas. Coop develops his card playing skills by seeking out older players who teach him many ways to deceive. In this section of the book we can see Coop’s flight from the adoptive family and the search for an identity. The initial trauma of the death of his birth parents, the loss of his adoptive mother, the less than warm relationship with his adoptive father and the attack by the adoptive father all culminate in Coop’s search. He wants to find out

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<sup>56</sup> Ondaatje, like Dickens, often names his characters using terms that portray something of their personality. This is aptronym. See Chapter 6

<sup>57</sup> The idea of the honourable thief is a recurring theme in Ondaatje’s work. His previous novel ‘In the Skin of a Lion’ (1987) contains the character Caravaggio. This figure reappears in a subsequent Ondaatje novel, ‘The English Patient’(1992). There are many clues that Rafael’s father in this book Divisadero (2007) is also Caravaggio.

about himself and his identity but he is fearful of the results of searching. Bluffing in poker is a metaphor for the manner in which Coop is holding himself together in the face of his tremendous losses and his defence against intimacy.

Seeking instruction in card cheating becomes his aim. Perhaps this serves as a communication about being cheated of his parents. It seems that this identity as a card sharp is to the detriment of his capacity to be close to people. At the peak of his powers he pulls off a scam against all the odds but the consequence is that he has to flee (again) and never return to these gambling tables.

Claire's development after the fight between her adoptive brother and her adoptive father takes an unusual turn. She becomes an investigator with the local Public Defender during the working week but secretly in her spare time is a solitary horse rider in the dangerous Sierras. Riding her horse alone in the deserted woods she takes many risks with her life. The loss of her close relationship with Anna first when Coop and Anna start a sexual relationship and then later when the whole family dissolves, may have pushed Claire into this split life of private solitary risk taking and professional 'searching' for secret details of other people's lives with the Public Defender. The choices she makes seem linked to searching behaviour. In the novel we see the character of Claire searching for an identity and trying to piece together her own story.

After the scam, Coop is alone and defended against any relationships other than superficial and amateur card playing circles. Ondaatje allows us access to the inner world of this man as he defends against any relationship in which he might find love. He believes that he has disappeared from sight after his famous sting but a violent gang has tracked him down. Very slowly they lure him into a sexual relationship with a blues singing junkie called Bridget. To begin with it appears that he has managed to have a relationship that does not really impact on either of them. The chilling scenes describing her obligatory drug use before sex, communicates their alienation from each other. However, all of that changes when he sees her sing on stage with her rock band. Her creativity with the music sparks a painful need to connect in him. Shockingly, at the very moment when he feels she is real, she disappears. There is a poignant section of the book which describes Coop's agonising searching for her. When he finds her it becomes clear that she is a front for a gang. The gang demand that he perform another

card cheat for their profit and when Coop refuses he is yet again beaten severely. This time he has serious neurological damage and memory problems.

By coincidence Claire is in the same town searching for somebody for her employer. She takes some recreational drugs (Ecstasy?) and as she comes down and still in a fragmented state, finds Coop by accident. When she wakes she is not sure if it has been real and endeavours to find him again. When she does he has already taken the terrible beating from the gang. She cares for him and protects him against the gang. In a cruel twist, with his faulty memory, Coop thinks she is Anna.

The narrative of the writer Lucien Segura is interwoven with Anna's move to the Gers region of France (appendix nine). Segura is the illegitimate son of a Spanish roofer and French woman. His stepfather the clock repairer is only in his life briefly but seems to have been a positive influence. As a boy and living alone with his widowed mother, Segura becomes friendly with his peasant neighbours Marie-Neige and Roman (French for novel). Marie-Neige is also an adoptee and is roughly his age but uneducated and married. (Appendix ten.) They form a closer relationship when Segura reads the novels of Alexander Dumas to her. When Segura loses the sight of an eye by a shard of glass in a bizarre accident<sup>58</sup>, Marie-Neige now has enough literacy skills to reverse their roles and read to him.

In adulthood he becomes famous for his poetry and we learn of the way in which his own family puzzle him. He discovers that his daughter is having an affair with her sister's husband<sup>59</sup>. This discovery is again by gazing from a distance. The relationship with his wife cools gradually (in particular when he reads her description of him in her diary) and when he goes to war (WW1) and catches diphtheria, it is the images of

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<sup>58</sup> This echoes the violent use of the shard of glass in the first section of the book when Anna defends Coop against her father. These are watershed moments in the character's lives.

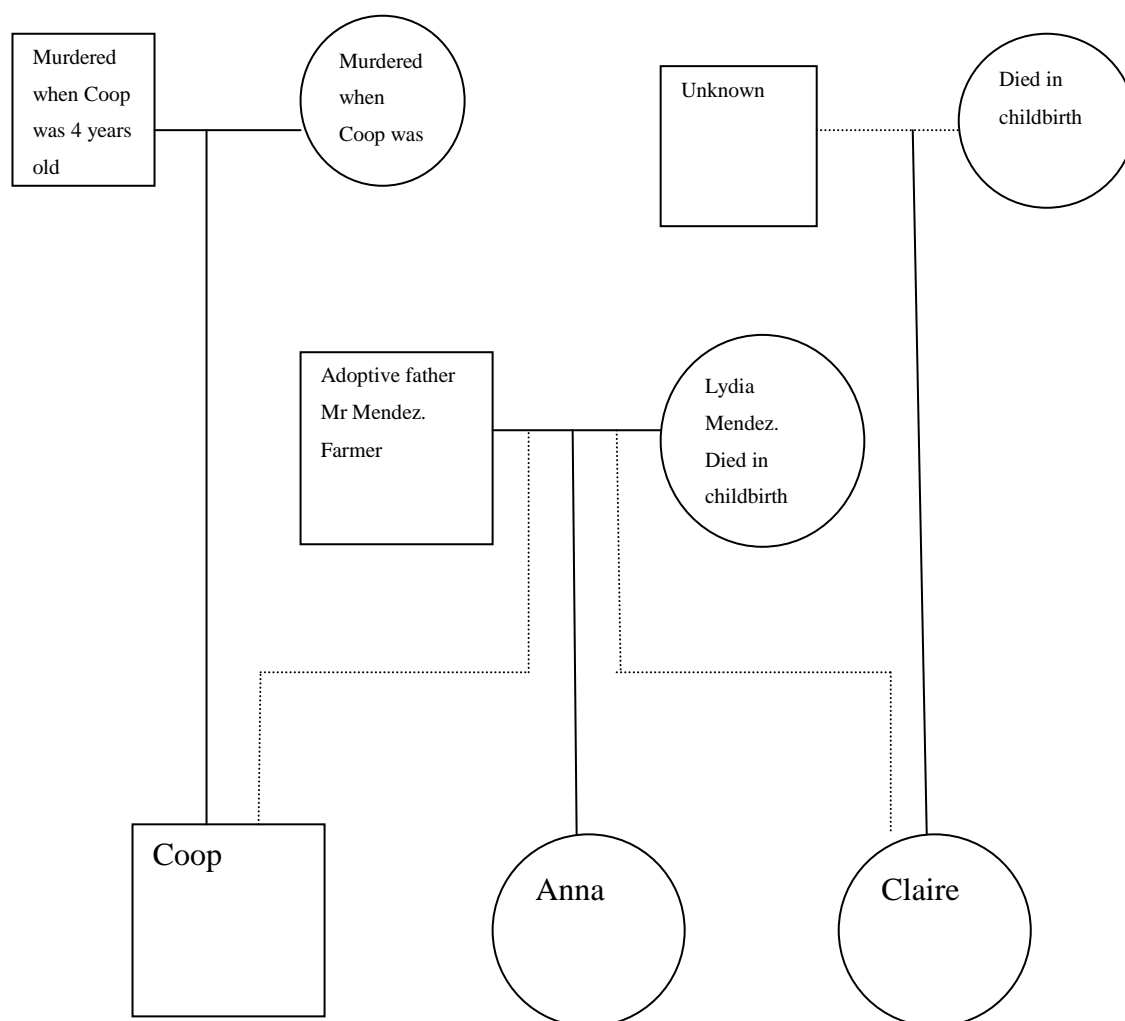
<sup>59</sup> This sexuality between an 'almost biologically related' (sister-in-law and brother in law) individuals in a family, echoes the relationship that Coop and Anna have (related by adoption). In the first part of the book the scene is described from the daughter's point of view. In this part of the complex book, it is seen from the father's point of view. It might also be reflected in the sexual relationship between Segura and Marie-Neige (childhood friends and neighbours). Interestingly it also has echoes of Bleak House and John Jarndyce's proposal of marriage to Esther Summerson (see chapter 6).

Marie-Neige that sustain him. On furlough from the war, he returns home to find his family evacuated. The dormant sexual relationship between Marie-Neige and Segura becomes a reality. However, when he returns home later he hallucinates a re-union with this woman only to discover that in reality she died some time ago.

The story evolves and Segura leaves his family and sets up home with the help of a gypsy family. (Appendix eleven.) This family contains the boy who will grow into the man called Rafael who becomes Anna's lover in France in the future. There is closeness between this boy and the elderly writer that is described as adoption. Having been a well respected poet, Segura then anonymously writes a series of best-selling adventure stories with barely concealed versions of Marie-Neige and in this way grieves his lost relationship. The last scenes of the book describe the manner in which Segura becomes engulfed in the loss of Rafael and takes his own life. In finding intimacy in his friendship with the boy, he grieves his failure to do the same with others in the past.

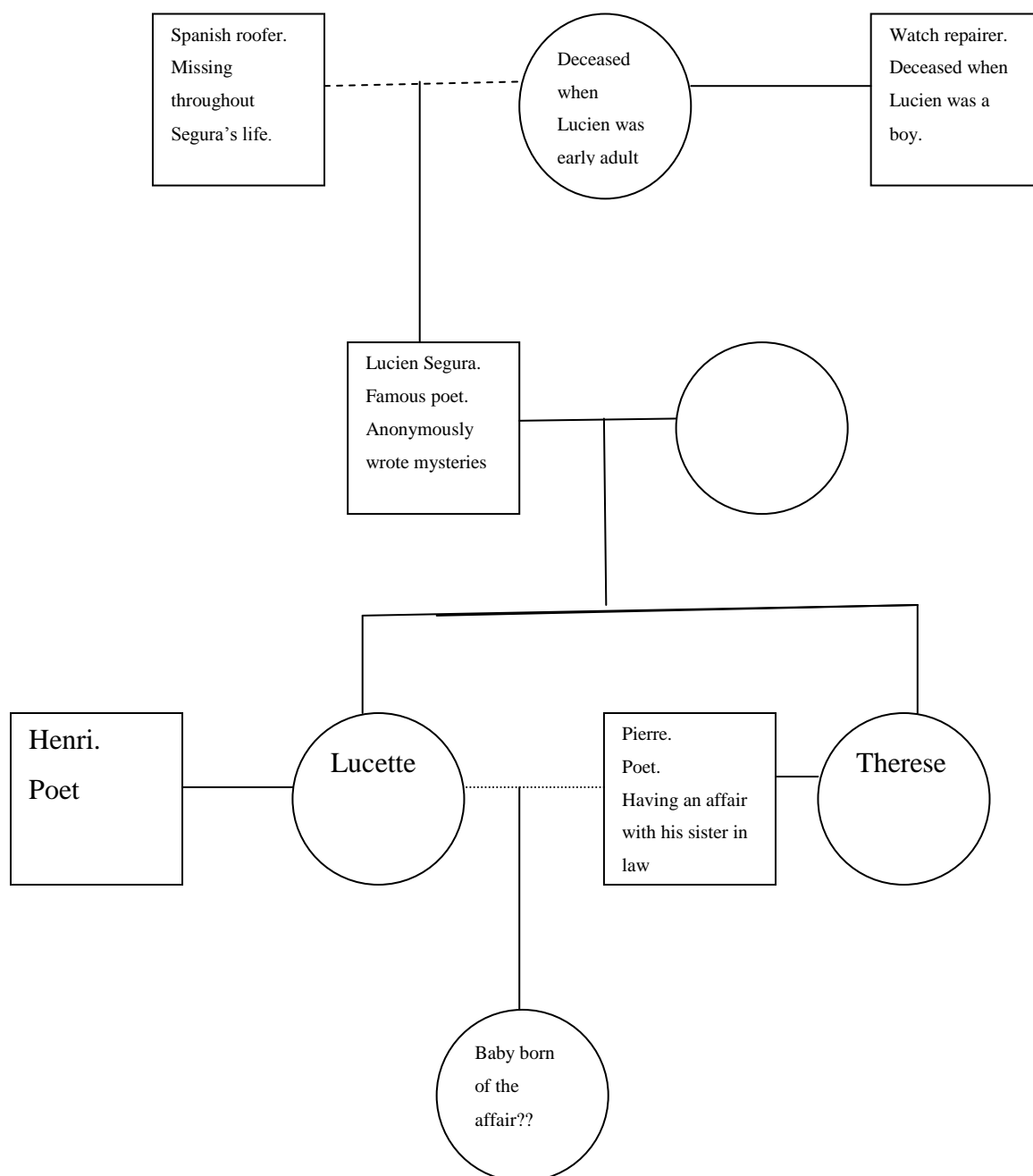
**Appendix eight.**

Genogram containing Anna, Claire and Coop circa 1970



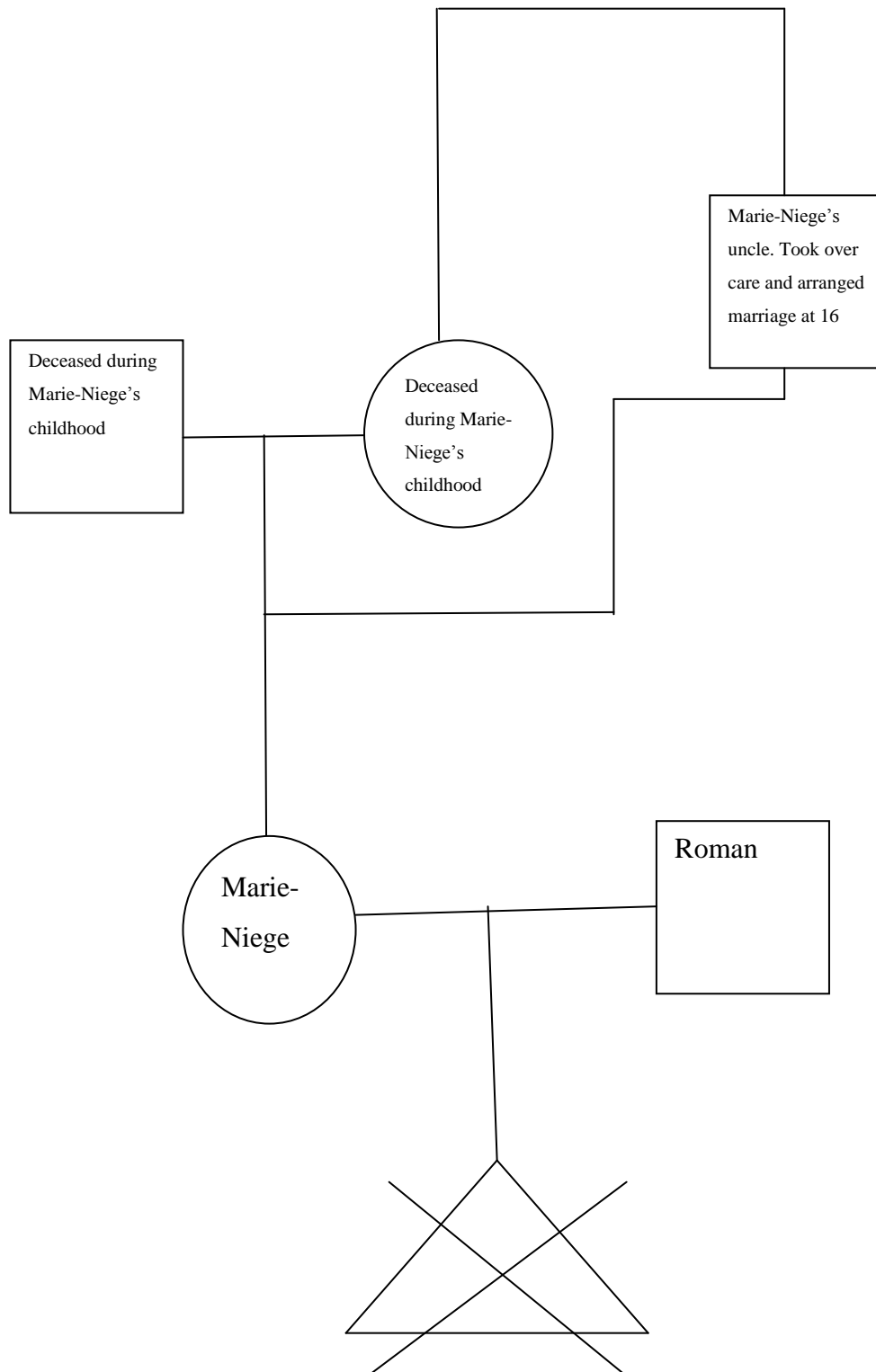
## Appendix nine.

Genogram of the Lucien Segura family circa 1917



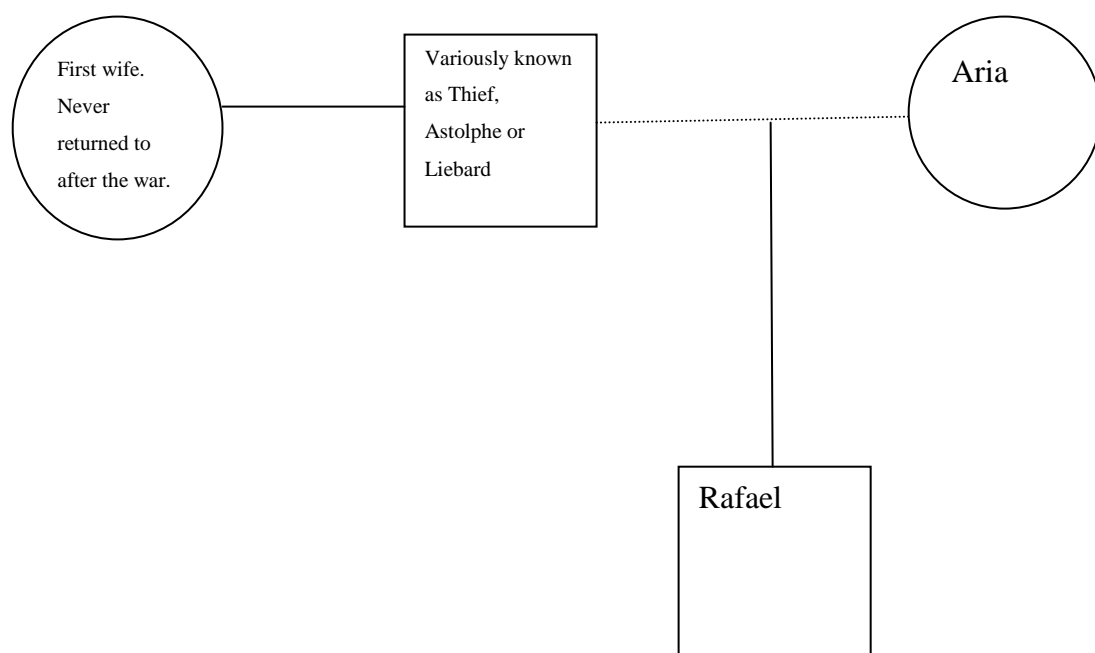
## **Appendix ten.**

### Genogram of Marie-Niege and Roma circa 1917



**Appendix eleven.**

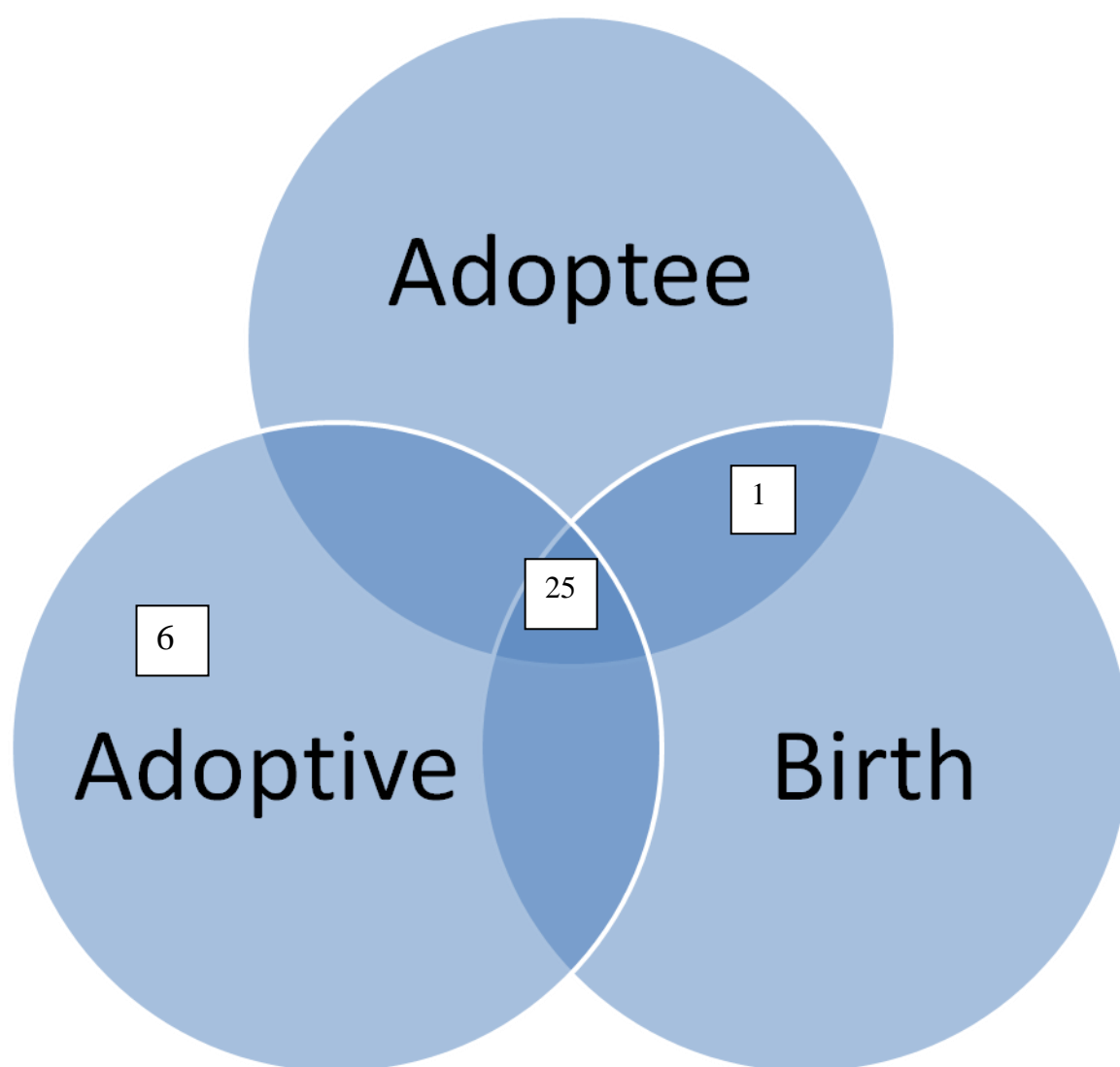
Genogram of the Travelling Family circa 1917





### Appendix thirteen.

Diagram showing the interview themes and to whom they were relevant. 25 across all three, 6 for adoptive parents only and one relevant to both adoptee and birth parents.



**Appendix fourteen.**

<b>Themes found in all 3 triadic members</b>	<b>Examples used from transcript</b>	<b>Confirming (C) or New Findings (N)</b>	<b>Major (Maj) or Minor (Min) Theme</b>
Loss and mourning	Adoptee#2 Birth #1 Adoptive #4	C	Maj
Incomplete	Adoptee#3 Birth #1 Adoptive #3	C	Maj
Physical Similarity	Adoptee#4 Birth #4 Adoptive #1	C	Maj
Guilt	Adoptee#2 Birth #2 Adoptive #1	C	Maj
Mental health issues	Adoptee#3 Birth #3 Adoptive #2	C	Maj
Searching	Adoptee#3 Birth #3 Adoptive #3	C	Maj
Identity	Adoptee#1 Birth #1 Adoptive #3	C	Maj
Life Cycle Events, Loss and the timing of search	Adoptee#3 Birth #3 Adoptive #2	C	Maj
Anger	Adoptee#1 Birth #3 Adoptive #3	C	Min
Replacement	Adoptee#1 Birth #3 Adoptive #1	C	Min
Difference	Adoptee#3 Birth #1 Adoptive #1	C	Min
Continuity and discontinuity	Adoptee#1 Birth #1 Adoptive #3	C	Min

Triangular psychology.	Adoptee#2 Birth #3 Adoptive #2	N	Maj
Powerlessness	Adoptee#2 Birth #1 Adoptive #3	N	Maj
‘Secrets and lies’	Adoptee#1 Birth #2 Adoptive #3	N	Maj
Elements of chance.	Adoptee#1 Birth #1 Adoptive #1	N	Min
Speed of relationship fit.	Adoptee#1 Birth #1 Adoptive #3	N	Min
Cash nexus	Adoptee#1 Birth #3 Adoptive #3	N	Min
Mismatch internal and reality	Adoptee#1 Birth #1 Adoptive #4	N	Min
Knowledge	Adoptee#2 Birth #3 Adoptive #1	N	Min
Meaning	Adoptee#2 Birth #1 Adoptive #2	N	Min
Loyalty	Adoptee#2 Birth #1 Adoptive #2	N	Min
Gratitude	Adoptee#2 Birth #1 Adoptive #4	N	Min
Rule breaking	Adoptee#2 Birth #4 Adoptive #3	N	Min
Importance of siblings	Adoptee#4 Birth #3 Adoptive #1	N	Min

<b>Themes found in only 2 of the triadic members</b>	<b>Examples present in transcript</b>	<b>Confirming (C) or New Findings (N)</b>	<b>Major (Maj) or Minor (Min) Theme</b>
Second rejection more painful	Adoptee #3 Birth #3	N	Maj
<b>Themes found in only 1 of the triadic members</b>	<b>Examples present in transcript</b>		
Family romance	Adoptee #4	C	Min
Possessiveness	Adoptive #1	C	Min
Competition	Adoptive #4	C	Min
Gaining at the expense of others	Adoptive #1	C	Min
‘Leap frogging’	Adoptive #3	N	Min
Rescue	Adoptive #1	C	Min

**Appendix fifteen.**

Adoption searching across the adoption triangle.

	<b>Timing of relinquishment</b>	<b>Focus for searching part one</b>	<b>Trigger</b>	<b>Focus for searching part two</b>
<b>Adoptee</b>	Birth or later	Intra-psychic	Life cycle event.	External world
<b>Birth Parent</b>	Birth or later	Intra-psychic	Life cycle event.	External world
<b>Adoptive Parent</b>	Non birth (The moment that the adoptive parents accept the loss of the potential biological child. This is probably a process not an event).	Intra-psychic search for perfect baby and then searching via adoption agencies.		Fear of search by the other two in the triad and preoccupation with it

## **Appendix sixteen.**

### i) New findings / Major themes for *all in the triad*

Triangular psychology.

Powerlessness.

“Secrets and lies”.

### ii) New findings / Minor themes for *all in the triad*

Elements of chance.

Speed of relationship fit.

Cash nexus.

Mismatch internal and reality.

Knowledge.

Meaning.

Loyalty.

Gratitude.

Rule breaking.

Importance of siblings.

### iii) New findings / Major theme for *adoptee and birth parent*.

Second rejection more painful.

### iv) New findings / Minor theme for *adoptive parents*.

Rescue.

### Appendix seventeen.

Characters in the adoption triangle in both analysed novels.

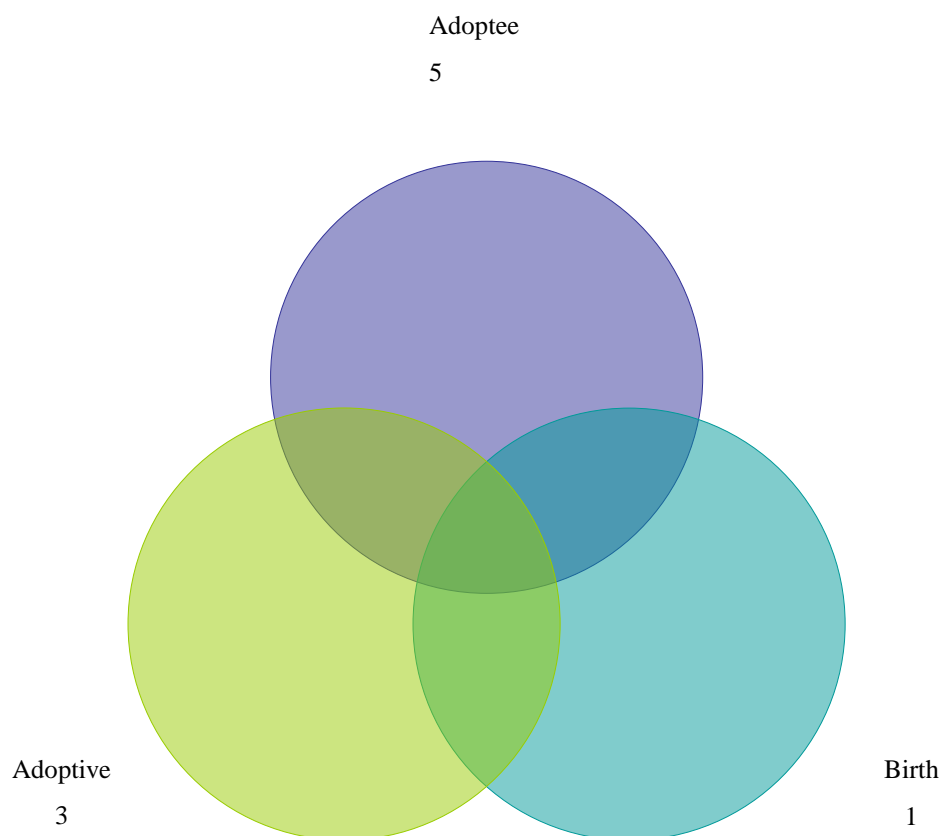
<b>Novel / Fiction</b>	<b>Adoptee</b>	<b>Birth parent</b>	<b>Adoptive Parent</b>
<b>Bleak House</b>	Esther Summerson	Lady Honoria Deadlock and Captain Hawden (AKA Nemo)	Mr John Jarndyce
<b>Bleak House</b>	Richard Carstone	Both dead and not part of this novel.	Mr John Jarndyce
<b>Divisadero</b>	Claire	Mother dead. Not part of this novel.	Mr Mendez (the farmer)
<b>Divisadero</b>	Coop	Both parents murdered. Not part of this novel.	Mr Mendez (the farmer)
<b>Divisadero</b>	Rafael	Absent	Segura (the poet and author)

**Appendix eighteen.**

Fictional characters from the two analysed novels.

9 people in various adoption triangles

5 Adoptees, 1 Birth Parent, 3 Adoptive Parents





### **Appendix nineteen.**

A comparison of the number of themes present in the research interviews and the two analysed novels.

Themes found in the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts.	32
Themes also found in Bleak House by Charles Dickens	26
Themes also found in Divisadero by Michael Ondaatje.	18

## Appendix twenty.

1.

### Loss and mourning

Bleak House.

“O my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!” (Dickens, 1853:579)

Divisadero

“It was here in this book that we discovered the woman who had died the week Claire and I were born. Only Coop, among the three of us, who’d worked on the farm since he was a boy, had known her as someone alive. For Claire and me she was a rumour, a ghost rarely mentioned by our father, someone interviewed for a few paragraphs in this book, and shown in a washed-out black-and-white photograph.” (Ondaatje, 2007:9)

2.

### Incomplete

Bleak House.

“I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how *can* I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn’t settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook, unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that’s my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since”. (Dickens, 1853:371)

Divisadero

“What is your mission, do you think? Vea had asked her once. And she didn’t know. In spite of her desire for a contained universe, her life felt scattered, full of many small moments, without great purpose. That is what she thought, though what is most

untrustworthy about our natures and self-worth is how we differ in our own realities from the way we are seen by others.” (Ondaatje, 2007:157)

3

### Physical Similarity

Bleak House.

“‘Blest!’ says Mr Guppy, staring in a kind of dismay at his friend, ‘if I can ever have seen her. Yet I know her! Has the picture been engraved, miss?’” ... ‘It’s unaccountable to me,’ he says, still staring at the portrait, ‘how well I know that picture! I’m dashed!’ adds Mr Guppy, looking around, ‘if I don’t think I must have had a dream of that picture, you know!’” (Dickens, 1853:110)

Divisadero.

“Years later, if he had been able to look back, Coop might have attempted to discern or reconsider aspects of his or Claire’s or Anna’s character, but when he had waved back to them, standing in the afternoon sunlight, Anna and Claire were interchangeable, one yellow shirt, one green, and he would not have been able to tell who wore this or that colour.” (Ondaatje, 2007:23)

4.

### Guilt

Bleak House.

“I ... confided to her that I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent), and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contended, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could” (Dickens, 1853:31)

5.

### Mental health issues

Bleak House

“But put yourself in my case, dragging on this dislocated life, sinking deeper and deeper into difficulty every day, continually hoping and continually disappointed, conscious of

change upon change for the worse in myself, and of no change for the better in anything else; and you will find it a dark-looking case sometimes, as I do”. (Dickens, 1853:625)

Divisadero.

“Cooper didn’t know the movies they were talking about. The others were in their thirties and forties, he was the youth among them. They watched over him, knowing him as a compulsive risk-taker, dangerous even to himself. But what he could do, which surprised them, was imitate the way each of them played, as if he were speaking in tongues. Though in the mania of a game, when you had to be calm, Cooper could be either startling or foolish. Someday he might be their skilled heir, but it felt to them that for now he was still in hand to hand combat, mostly with himself”. (Ondaatje, 2007:44)

6.

### Searching

Bleak House.

“I have the most confused impressions of that walk. I recollect that it was neither night nor day; that the sleet was still falling, the street-lamps were not yet put out and that all the ways were deep with it. I recollect a few chilled people passing in the streets. I recollect the wet housetops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went. ... the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real”. (Dickens, 1853:913)

Divisadero.

“For some years Claire had been living two distinct lives. During the week she had a job in San Francisco with a lawyer named Veal, a senior deputy in the Office of the Public Defender. The work was mostly arduous research, and Veal had walked Claire through the craft and process of it, noting there was something carefully obsessive in this woman who was able to recognize a mouse of information miles away. Then, on weekends, Claire disappeared. She would drive out of the city to

the farm south of Petaluma and spend an hour or two of the Friday night with her father”. (Ondaatje, 2007:105)

7.

### Identity

Bleak House.

“Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden ... my own name soon became quite lost”. (Dickens, 1853:121)

Divisadero.

“Claire assumed some ancestor in her changeling blood had been a horse person. She rose from her limp into the stirrup and was instantly free of it. It was in this way that she discovered the greater distances in herself”. (Ondaatje, 2007:100)

8.

### Life Cycle Events, Loss and the timing of search

Bleak House.

“My unhappy mother told me that in my illness she had been nearly frantic. She had but then known that her child was living. She could not have suspected me to be that child before. She had followed me down here, to speak to me but once in all her life”.  
(Dickens, 1853:580)

9.

### Anger

Bleak House.

“Rick mistrusts and suspects me – goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests; claims against clashing his, and what not”.  
(Dickens, 1853:559)

Divisadero.

“It was a field hospital on the outskirts of Santa Rosa, and to put it brutally, they owed him a wife, they owed him something”. (Ondaatje, 2007:11)

10.

#### Replacement

Bleak House.

“Both houses are your home, my dear,’ said he, ‘but the older Bleak House claims priority. When you and my boy are strong enough to do it, come and take possession of your home.’” (Dickens, 1853:986)

Divisadero.

“What is not in the small white book, therefore, is the strange act of our father during the chaos surrounding her death, when he took on informally the adoption of a child from the same hospital where his wife was giving birth - the daughter of another mother, who had also died – bringing both children home and raising the other child, who had been named Claire, as his own. So there would be two girls, Anna and Claire, born the same week. People assumed that both were his daughters. This was our father’s gesture that grew from Lydia Mendez’ passing. The dead mother of the other child had no relatives, or was a solitary; perhaps that was how he was able to do this”. (Ondaatje, 2007:11)

11.

#### Difference

Bleak House.

“She was always grave and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of the other people made her frown all her life. I felt so different from her, even making every allowance for the differences between a child and a woman; I felt so poor,

so trifling, and so far off; that I never could be unrestrained with her- no, could never even love her as I wished.” (Dickens, 1853:28)

Divisadero.

“Everything about gold was in opposition to Coop’s life on our farm. It must have felt to him that he came from nowhere, the horror of his parent’s murder never spoken of by us. He had been handed the habits and duties that came with farm life ... But gold was euphoria and chance to Coop, an illogical discipline, a tall story that included a murder or mistaken identity or a love affair”. (Ondaatje, 2007:13)

12

Triangular psychology.

Bleak House.

“It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother’s voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I longed to do, and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. It matters little that I watched for every public mention of my mother’s name; that I passed and repassed the door of her house in town, loving it, but afraid to look at it; that I once sat in the theatre when my mother was there and saw, and when we were so wide asunder, before the great company of all degrees, that any link or confidence between us seemed a dream.” (Dickens, 1853:669)

Divisadero.

“But so much had been wasted. She had only a distant father, and now Coop, like this, a boy remembering nothing. She wanted to fold the two halves of her life together like a map. She imagined her father, standing now on the edge of the cornfield, his white beard speckled by the shadows of the long green leaves, an awkward, solitary man, hungry for the family he had brought together and then lost – his wife in childbirth, this orphan son of a neighbour, and Anna, whom he had loved probably most of all, who was lost to them forever. There was just herself, Claire, not of his blood, the extra daughter he had brought home from the hospital in Santa Rosa.” (Ondaatje, 2007:171)

Powerlessness

Bleak House.

“And I am to hide my guilt, as I have done so many years?’

‘As you have done so many years. I should not have made that reference myself, Lady Dedlock, but I may now remind you that your secret can be no heavier to you than it was, and is no worse and no better than it was. *I* know it certainly, but I believe we have never wholly trusted each other’”. (Dickens, 1853:659)

Divisadero.

“Coop stood there not moving. Her father walked towards him, with a three-legged stool, and swung it into his face. The boy fell back through the collapsing wall of glass into the cabin. The he stood up slowly and turned to look at the man who had raised him, who was now coming towards him again. He didn’t move. Another blow on his chest knocked him onto his back. Anna began screaming. She saw Coop’s strange submissiveness, saw her father attack Coop’s beautiful strong face as if that were the cause, as if in this way he could remove what had happened. Then her father was kneeling above Coop, reaching for the stool again and smashing it down, until the body was completely still”. (Ondaatje, 2007:33)

14.

‘Secrets and lies’

Bleak House.

“Pray be seated – here, near me. Don’t distress yourself; it’s of no use. Mrs Rachel, I needn’t inform you who were acquainted with the late Miss Barbary’s affairs, that her means die with her; and that this young lady, now her aunt is dead –

“My aunt, sir!’

‘It really is of no use carrying on a deception when no object is to be gained by it,’ said Mr Kenge, smoothly. ‘Aunt in fact, though not in law. Don’t distress yourself! Don’t weep! Don’t tremble!’”. (Dickens, 1853:33)



Divisadero.

“But he had refused, always laconic and silent about the landscape of his past. Even now, he and Claire circled the episode that led to the absence of Anna in their lives, never speaking of it. It was as if the loss of Anna had consumed him and then exhausted him, until he had in some way concluded his emotion, the way he had probably done after the death of his wife, when his daughters were too young to know about it. And even if the pain and his fierce love of Anna were still somewhere, loose in his skin, he and this remaining daughter would now be silent about it. The last time Claire had spoken of Anna, her father had raised his palm into the air with an awful plea for her to stop. There was no longer closeness between him and Claire; whatever intimacy had once existed had always been engineered by Anna”. (Ondaatje, 2007:104)

15.

#### Elements of chance

Bleak House.

“My Lady, changing her position, sees the papers on the table – looks at them nearer – looks at them nearer still – asks impulsively:

‘Who copied that?’

Mr Tulkinghorn stops short, surprised by my Lady’s animation and her unusual tone.

‘Is it what you people call law-hand?’ she asks, looking full at him in her careless way again, and toying with her screen.

‘Not quite. Probably’ – Mr Tulkinghorn examines it as he speaks – ‘the legal character it has, was acquired after the original hand was formed. Why do you ask?’

Anything to vary this detestable monotony. O, go on do!’

Mr Tulkinghorn reads again. The heat is greater, my Lady screen her face. Sir Leicester doses, starts up suddenly, and cries ‘Eh? What do you say?’

‘I say I am afraid,’ says Mr Tulkinghorn, who has risen hastily, ‘that Lady Dedlock is ill.’

‘Faint,’ my Lady murmurs, with white lips, ‘only that: but it is like the faintness of death. Don’t speak to me. Ring, and take me to my room!’”. (Dickens, 1853:26)

Divisadero.

“But Coop loved risk and could be passive around danger. He’d been gathered into this fold by a neighbour whose wife died a few months later in childbirth. He knew all things were held in the palm of chance”. (Ondaatje, 2007:24)

16.

Speed of relationship fit.

Bleak House.

“I looked at her; but I could not see her, I could not hear her, I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild, that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassioned me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, ‘O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me!’ – when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us”. (Dickens, 1853:579)

17.

Cash nexus

Bleak House.

“ ‘Mr Vholes! If any man had told me, when I first went to John Jarndyce’s house, that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed – that he was what he has gradually turned out to be – I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas, now, I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay, and every new disappointment, is only a new injury from John Jarndyce’s hand’”. (Dickens, 1853:626)

Divisadero.

“Everything about gold was in opposition to Coop’s life on our farm. It must have felt to him that he came from nowhere, the horror of his parent’s murder never spoken of by us. He had been handed the habits and duties that came with farm life ... But gold was euphoria and chance to Coop, an illogical discipline, a tall story that included a murder or mistaken identity or a love affair”. (Ondaatje, 2007:13)

18.

### Knowledge

Bleak House.

“I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama’s grave. I had never been told where it was.” (Dickens, 1853:29)

Divisadero

“Claire assumed some ancestor in her changeling blood had been a horse person. She rose from her limp into the stirrup and was instantly free of it. It was in this way that she discovered the greater distances in herself”. (Ondaatje, 2007:100)

19.

### Looking for meaning

Bleak House

“O, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don’t go away. O, speak to me!” (Dickens, 1853:30)

Divisadero

“What we make, why it is made, how we draw a dog, who it is we are drawn to why we cannot forget. Everything is collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border we cross”. (Ondaatje, 2007:16)

20.

### Loyalty

Bleak House

“ ‘Mr Jarndyce – ‘I was beginning, when my mother hurriedly  
‘Does *he* suspect?’

‘No,’ said I. ‘No, indeed! Be assured that he does not!’ And I told her what he had related to me as his knowledge of my story, ‘But he is so good and sensible,’ said I, ‘that perhaps if he knew –‘

My mother. Who until this time had made no change in her position, raised her hand up to my lips, and stopped me.

‘Confide fully in him,’ she said, after a little while. ‘You have my free consent – a small gift from such a mother to her injured child! – but do not tell me of it. Some pride is left in me, even yet.’ (Dickens, 1853:581)

21.

### Gratitude

Bleak House

“The people even praise Me as the doctor’s wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake”.  
(Dickens, 1853:988)

22.

### Rule breaking

#### Bleak House

“He did not speak to me any more, until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl, and to be studious; and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never, for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind”. (Dickens, 1853:38)

23.

#### Importance of siblings

#### Bleak House

“I heard my Ada crying at the door, day and night; I had heard her calling to me that I was cruel and did not love her; I had heard her praying and imploring to be let in to nurse and comfort me, and to leave my bedside no more; but I had only said, when I could speak, ‘Never, my sweet girl, never!’ and I had over and over again reminded Charley that she was to keep my darling from the room, whether I lived or died. Charley had been true to me in that time of need, and with her little hand and her great heart had kept the door fast”. (Dickens, 1853:556)

#### Divisadero

“Anna and Coop and Claire. The three of them, she had always believed, made up a three-panelled Japanese screen, each one self-sufficient, but revealing different qualities or tones when placed beside the others. Those screens made more sense to her than single-framed paintings from the West that existed without context. Their lives, surely, remained linked, wherever they were. Coop had been adopted into the family in much the same way that she had been taken from the hospital in Santa Rosa and brought home beside Anna. An orphan and a changeling ... they had evolved, intimate as siblings, from that moment. She’d lived one of her essential lives with Coop, and she could never dismantle herself from him”. (Ondaatje, 2007:156)

24.

## Second rejection more painful

Bleak House

“We held one another for a little space yet, but she was so firm, that she took my hands away, and put them back against my breast, and, with a last kiss as she held them there, released then, and went from me into the wood. I was alone; and, calm and quiet below me in the sun and shade, lay the old house, with its terraces and turrets, on which there seemed to be such complete repose when I first saw it, but which now looked like the obdurate and unpitying watcher of my mother’s misery”. (Dickens, 1853:582)

25.

## Possessiveness

Bleak House

“ ‘Allan,’ said my guardian, ‘take from me, a willing gift, the best wife that ever a man had. What more can I say for you, than that I know you deserve her! Take with her the little home she brings you. You know what she will make it, Allan; you know what she has made its namesake. Let me share its felicity sometimes, and what do I sacrifice? Nothing, nothing.’ ” (Dickens, 1853:966)

Divisadero.

“Since the death of our mother it was Coop who listened to us complain and worry, and he allowed us the stage when he thought we wished for it. Our father gazed right through Coop. He was training him as a farmer and nothing else”. (Ondaatje, 2007:9)

26.

## Rescue

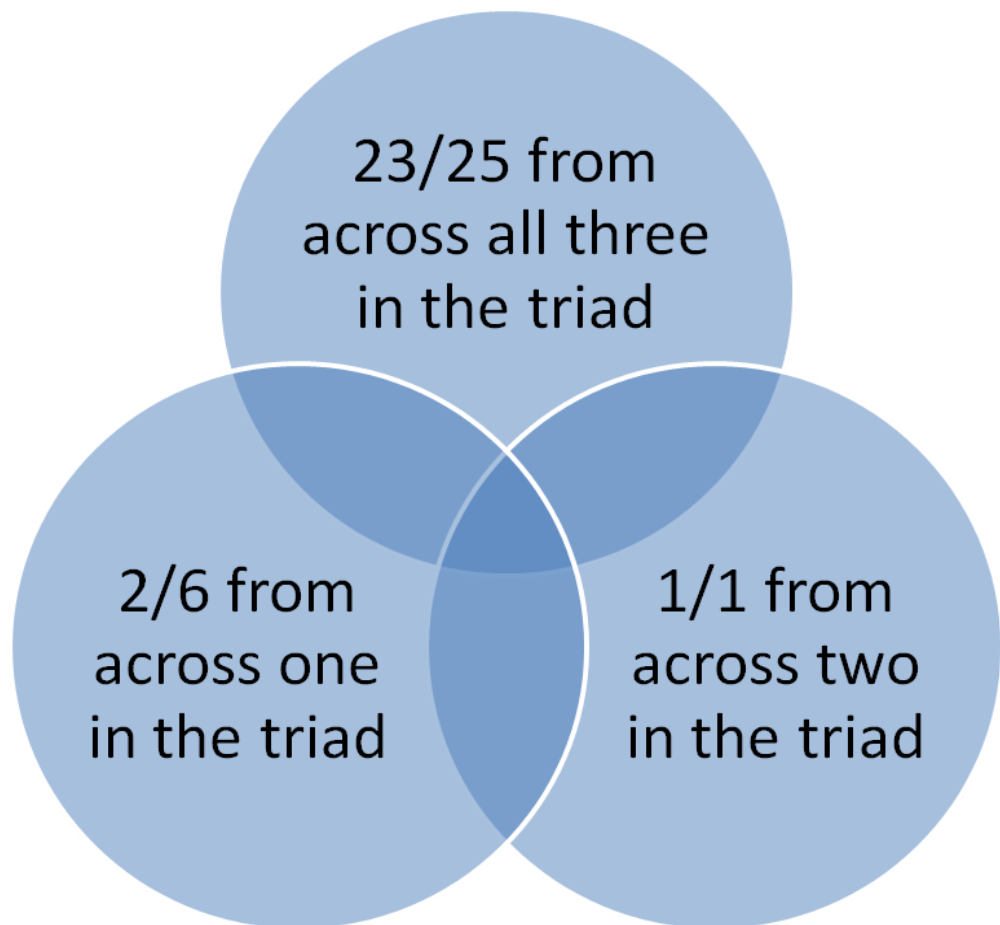
Bleak House.

“I hear of a good little orphan girl without a protector, and I take it into my head to be that protector. She grows up, and more than justifies my good opinion, and I remain her guardian and her friend. What is there in all of this? So, so! Now, we have cleared off

old scores, and I have before me thy pleasant, trusting, trusty face again". (Dickens, 1853:117)

### Appendix twentyone

Diagram showing a comparison of research interview themes and themes from the two analysed novels. (Second figure is the interview number.)





## Appendix twentytwo

Forms of substitute care.

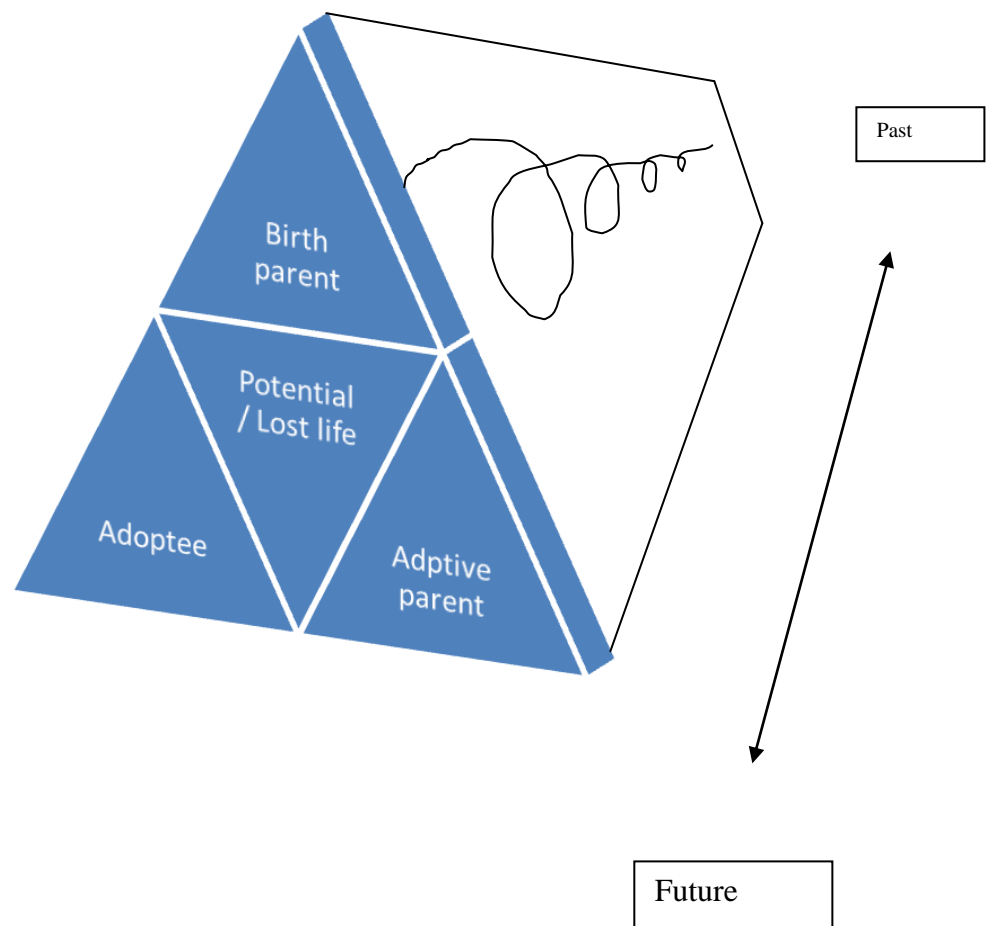
<b>Form of substitute care</b>	<b>Infant adoption</b>	<b>Late placed adoption</b>	<b>Kinship placement</b>	<b>Special Guardianship</b>	<b>Long term fostering</b>
<b>Legal state of children in substitute care</b>	Legally separate from birth parents	Legally separate from birth parents. However such cases usually now contain an element of 'open adoption' contact.	Parental rights move to carers but parental rights and responsibility remains with birth parents	Parental rights move to carers but parental responsibility remains with birth parents	Depending on the legal order, the state takes over parental rights but the birth parents retain some decision making

Most secure .....Least secure
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### **Appendix twenty-three.**

A diagram to illustrate the fluidity of time in 'triangular psychology'.

Diagram showing the fluidity of time in  
'triangular psychology'



**Appendix twenty-four.**

Adoption searching across the adoption triangle.

	Timing of relinquishment	Focus for searching part one	Trigger	Focus for searching part two
Adoptee	Birth or later	Intra-psychic	Life cycle event.	External world
Birth Parent	Birth or later	Intra-psychic	Life cycle event.	External world
Adoptive Parent	Non birth (process not an event).	Intra-psychic search for perfect baby and then searching via adoption agencies		Fear of search by the other two in the triad and preoccupation with it